

PD SHORT STORIES

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THE RING WITH THE GREEN STONE

by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

From *Edgewater People* (Harper and Brothers; New York: 1918)

Ann Livingstone sat swaying back and forth in her green cane rocker on her front porch. About her was such strength of green light of tree-boughs, ruffling in a southwest wind, that even the folds of her black-silk skirt showed faint reflexes of that color. Her smooth, blond hair had a greenish cast. It was, of all her fair, slender, middle-aged figure, as if it were seen through depths of levels of green water, like a mermaid's. It may be that people, like landscapes, have their color-schemes. Ann had always loved the soothing background color of the earth-green. She had surrounded herself with it. Her home was vine-screened and surrounded by trees and hedges. In her youth she had worn green gowns; now she wore black, and left the green to her daughter Ruth, who had inherited her mother's love of the color.

The porch was sweet with blooming roses and elder-flowers, and other indefinite odors, blending in a bouquet of perfume. Presently there cut through it a pungent odor of tobacco. Ann glanced over her shoulder and saw her brother Stephen's face framed in a window. It was a large, handsome, elderly face, white-bearded and keen-eyed.

"Has Ruth come?" the man asked.

"No. I am waiting for her. You know she stayed at Jim Gordon's mother's longer than she expected. Charlotte Gordon was perfectly sweet when Jim became engaged to Ruth; she insisted that he should use the setting of her own engagement-ring for the one he gave Ruth, and it was too small and had to be enlarged."

"What became of the stone in Jim's mother's own ring?"

"She must have lost it, I suppose. Anyway, the setting is hand-wrought Indian gold and very beautiful."

"What is the stone?"

"Oh, an emerald, of course. Ruth is as much a crank over green as her old mother. Here she comes now. She will be so delighted to see you."

The man lounged out as a car rolled up, and a girl sprang out. She was fair, like her mother, very pretty, and clad in pale green like a fairy. She fluttered lightly up the steps, kissed her mother, and made round blue eyes of interrogation at the man.

"Your uncle Stephen, dearest," said Ann. "He has left the West for good, and is going to stay here with us."

The girl made a dart at the man. She flung her arms around his neck. She was curiously childlike in her ways. Her voice even struck unexpectedly sudden high, sweet cadences, like a child's.

"I am so glad you have come, Uncle Stephen!" said she.

Ruth's hair was of a light, feathery quality, fluffed about her small face. She stood looking at her uncle

smilingly, and teetered a little on her toes, with an effect of dancing.

“Does she look like me, Stephen?” asked Ann.

“She looks like herself, and nobody else on earth, unless it is a queer kind of humming-bird,” said Stephen.

He held the girl off and shook her slender shoulders and regarded her with tenderness, this little, slight beauty of a girl, who looked at him with the questioning eyes of a child, ready to be loved, ready to shrink if flouted. Suddenly a serious expression came over her face.

“You know about Jim?” she asked. “Mother has told you?”

“She has told me you were going to leave just as I got where I could see a little of you and your mother after all these years,” said Stephen. He looked rather grave. His own romance of life had failed.

“Jim and I are always to spend our summers here,” said Ruth; “and if you stay with mother, everything will be just complete. All that troubled me was leaving mother, winters. Of course she will stay a great deal in the city with Jim and me. And now you can come, too, Uncle Stephen. I am not going to leave.”

“Girls like you are born to leave,” said Stephen, laughing. “What are wings for?”

Ruth, starting quickly, stood away and gazed intently at her left hand.

“What is the matter, Ruth?” asked her mother.

“My ring doesn't shine as much as I thought it did,” Ruth answered.

“It is only because it is so dark in here. You must remember this porch is always twilight with the vines.”

“I suppose that is it. But it startled me all of a sudden. It had always blazed up in my eyes like a green dewdrop, and then it did not.”

“Nonsense,” said Ann. “You forget that no jewel except a diamond will show much light in a gloomy place.”

“And not all diamonds,” said Stephen. His shrewd eyes looked shrewder. “May I see your ring now, Ruth?” he asked.

Ruth extended her hand simply. She looked at him for admiration. Stephen bent over the little hand, on which was the ring with the large green stone. He gave a hardly perceptible start.

“Isn't it a beauty, Uncle Stephen?”

“Do you object to taking the ring off, dear?” asked Stephen.

Ruth laughed. “Oh, goodness, no! I am not superstitious, and, anyway, the ring has been off since Jim put it on a number of times. The setting was Mrs. Gordon's, Jim's mother's. It was too large, and it had

to be altered. I was without any engagement-ring for several days while I was away.”

Ruth took the ring from her finger and handed it to her uncle. He rose leisurely and went down the steps into the broad sunlight. When he returned he looked pale, but he was smiling.

Ruth held out her hand for the ring. “Isn't it wonderful, Uncle Stephen?” she cried, eagerly.

“Yes, very wonderful. Nothing like an emerald for beauty among the whole list of gems,” replied Stephen.

While his niece was readjusting the ring he made a slight gesture to his sister.

“You had better go to your room and change your dress for dinner, dear,” Ann said immediately.

After the girl had gone Stephen turned to his sister, and her face was as pale as his. “What is it, Stephen?”

“Ann, you must simply call up your courage.”

“I am ready,” said she, steadily.

“That stone is not an emerald. It is only a clever imitation.”

“Stephen!”

“I am positive. I know quite a good deal about gems. It is a clever imitation; I have never seen one just like it. When the child spoke about its not shining I began to suspect. When I had it down there in the sunlight, I knew.”

“Stephen, do you realize the full import if it is not?”

“Yes, I am afraid I do. Can the child hear?”

“No; her room is on the other side.”

“It means a good deal more than a fake gem. It means a fake man.”

“Stephen, there must be some mistake. Jim Gordon is the soul of honor. He cannot know.”

“Where did he buy the stone?”

“At Lord & Lovejoy's.”

“The best and most reliable firm in the city. Are you sure?”

“He said so. He said, and laughed, that he had to take their word for it; that he knew nothing about precious stones. He said that they declared it was the finest emerald that had ever come into their possession.”

Stephen Ward looked grim. "I will make it my business to see these gentlemen to-morrow," said he. "I will take the ring in and ask a few questions."

"Stephen, Ruth will suspect."

"She will have to know finally, I fear, in simple justice to her and her future life. But she will not suspect to-morrow. The stone is a little loose in the setting. Queer work that is for a firm like Lord & Lovejoy."

"Stephen."

"What, dear? Don't look so pale."

"There may be a dishonest salesman."

"Yes, there may be. I intend to find out."

"It is not, of course, the value of the stone," said Ann in a low, distressed voice. "It is the imputation cast upon —"

"The man who gave it to her? Yes."

"Jim is rich. He can afford anything. But if he were poor — to give her an imitation gem and tell her it was an emerald —"

"It means, of course, that the man ranks with the spurious stone," said Stephen Ward.

"Don't tell Ruth."

"Why, Ann, would you dare not tell her?"

"It would break her heart."

"It might be a cleaner break than she would get if she married the man."

"It may be the salesman. You know there are dishonest salesmen. You know there are, Stephen."

"Yes, there are. We will call it the salesman to-night. We won't let the child suspect. There is no sense in doing that until I have made sure." Stephen sat staring gloomily. He was reflecting. "A firm like Lord & Lovejoy does not employ dishonest salesmen." The sentence rang in his mental consciousness; however, he concealed it.

The next morning it was easy enough to tell Ruth that he had discovered when he had examined the ring the night before that the setting was loose, and that he was going to the city on business, and would take the ring to the jeweler's and have it attended to, and bring it back with him that night.

Ruth agreed in a panic. "Oh," she cried, "how perfectly dreadful it would be if I had lost my beautiful emerald the way Jim's mother lost the stone from this same setting! Oh, do take it, Uncle Stephen, and be sure they fix it to-day, because Jim may be here to-morrow, and I don't want him to find me without

it.”

When Stephen returned that night he found his sister alone on the porch.

“Ruth has gone out in the Waites' car,” she said.

“I am glad,” said Stephen, settling heavily into a chair and wiping his forehead. The day had been warm.

Ann looked at him, with apprehension.

“It is pretty bad, Ann. That is, it looks pretty bad.”

“The salesman?”

“I was at once assured, with no questions on my part, by the senior member of the firm, that of course no one in their employ could be for a second suspected. I had to agree. The supposition is as practically impossible, with people like that, as spurious stones.”

“Then —?”

“I saw Mr. Lord and his son, and Mr. Lovejoy and others. I stayed an hour in their private office. A magnificent emerald was put in the setting of this ring.”

Stephen took the little box from his pocket, opened it, and removed the ring. The green stone, exactly the color of an emerald, greeted their scrutiny like a defiant eye of mystery. “They said a great deal about the beauty of the setting,” Stephen remarked, gloomily.

“And the stone?”

“They said very little. I said very little. What could I say? The members of that old firm are gentlemen. Besides, my position was peculiar. I could not accuse them of selling an imitation emerald to the man engaged to be married to my own niece. You understand very well that —”

Ann's face paled, and took on an expression as of one who faced fire. “I understand perfectly that a counter-accusation might have been made; and yet, Jim Gordon —”

“Jim is no more of a gentleman, he has no greater reputation for honor, than the members of that old and honorable commercial house.”

“Jim simply could not knowingly have given Ruth a spurious emerald for a betrothal ring,” Ann said.

“No; I agree with you. He could not. He did not. And yet —”

“You think Ruth must be told?”

“It is imperative that Ruth be told.”

“She will not be in the least influenced. Her faith in Jim will not waver a hair.”

“All the same, in simple justice to the child, she must be told.”

Ann leaned her head back on her chair. “You will have to tell her, Stephen,” she said, faintly. “Ruth must not associate her own mother with this horrible thing.”

“Very well, I will tell her,” replied Stephen. “It is not an enviable task, but I agree with you. She must not have the first shock from her mother. It is monstrous.”

“She will be home before long,” said Ann. She regarded her brother pitifully.

“You go to your room, old girl, and lie down, and leave me to face the music,” Stephen said, kindly.

He was sitting alone on the porch, smoking, when Ruth returned. Her uncle thought he had never seen her look so lovely and so radiantly happy.

“Such a ride!” she cried. “And I have had a note from Jim, and he's coming to-night.”

“Here is your ring, my dear,” said Stephen. There was nothing unusual in his voice. Ruth held out her hand readily for the ring. She looked at the green stone and frowned a little.

“Strange how dim the emerald looks in here,” she said.

“Do you want me to tell you why, my dear?”

Ruth gazed at him. “Why? I don't understand what you mean, Uncle Stephen.”

“You know that I am rather wise about gems?”

“Yes, of course. Mother has told me. I know you have a valuable collection.”

“Are you sure you want me to tell you?”

“To tell why my emerald looks so very dim in this light? Yes.”

“My dear Ruth, it is not an emerald.”

“What is it?”

“A very clever imitation.”

Ruth's face did not change color, but all the lines seemed to harden. It was like watching the petrification of a rose.

Suddenly Ann's face appeared in the doorway. Her anxiety had not allowed her to remain absent. She listened, pale and breathless.

“Why do you think that?” Ruth asked in an even voice.

"I know considerable about gems. I have the opinions of Lord & Lovejoy and a recognized expert. That stone is not an emerald. They did not sell that stone. Moreover, that firm never allowed a ring to leave their house as badly set as that was yesterday."

Ruth turned slightly and saw her mother. "Will Lord & Lovejoy or anybody else make this public?" she asked.

"I have their word of honor that they will not, and you know that neither your mother nor I will, but Ruth —"

Ruth faced them both in a sudden whirl of defiance. "Listen," she said in her voice with the high, childish note — "listen. I do not care what Lord & Lovejoy say; I do not care what anybody on earth says; I do not care now; I shall never care. I do not care whether this green stone in this ring is an emerald or not. It does not concern me. All that concerns me is Jim. All the world and all the precious stones in the world can never make any difference with me. I do not know anything about this green stone. I do not know how it got in the ring. Understand, mother; understand, Uncle Stephen, I do not care. You are never to speak to me of this again."

"But, Ruth, you — must believe —" Ann began, faintly.

"I believe nothing, either one way or the other," replied Ruth, with a sort of fierce radiance. "It is only that I do not care. It all means nothing to me. I love Jim, and he loves me. That is all. No green stone can separate us."

Ruth kissed her mother and passed her, going into the house.

A ghastly expression was over Ann's face. "She will go on and marry him," she said. "She will not speak of it to Jim. She knows nobody else will. As a matter of fact, I don't see how anybody ever can. There is no possible substantiality back of it. Jim Gordon never changed a real emerald for a false one and gave it to my girl."

"I suppose that is true," Stephen said, thoughtfully. "I don't really think one man at Lord & Lovejoy's suspected him. As a matter of fact, I wonder if they were not much nearer suspecting me. We cannot say one word to Jim, and yet, Ann, to let this marriage go on —"

"I am her mother," said Ann, in a tragic voice.

"Ruth tells me that Jim is coming to-night."

"Is he? She has heard, then. I thought he would come. Well, nothing can be done to-night. We must wait. Something may throw light on the matter. I must go and dress now. We simply have to wait developments."

"I suppose you are right," assented Stephen, "but sometimes it has seemed to me that developments needed the lash and spur more than anything on God's earth." He sighed, and followed his sister into the house.

Stephen was right about his estimate of the slowness of developments. Nothing whatever developed

concerning the ring. The engagement was to be a short one. Ruth went on with her preparations. Jim was often at the house. The more Stephen saw of him, the more it seemed impossible to suspect him.

One evening shortly before the day set for the marriage, Jim unconsciously strengthened his own cause. He had been watching Ruth's slender hand move as she was sewing, and suddenly he said: "Give me your hand a second, Ruth. No; rather, take the emerald off. I want to look at it."

Ruth obeyed. Then she bent her head closely over her work. Jim held the ring up to the light. He shook his head.

"I know absolutely nothing about gems," he said, "but if I had not bought this emerald from Lord & Lovejoy's I would most certainly think I had been cheated. Of course it must be the magnificent emerald they told me it was, but I must say I would never dream it. Mr. Ward, you look at the thing. You are a connoisseur. You tell me what you think of it."

Ruth shot one glance at her uncle as he took the ring. It was rather a terrible glance. It was full of deadly terror, of fierce command. Stephen nodded slightly at her. He held the ring up to the light.

"Of course it must be all right, coming from such a firm as that," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so, but how does it look to you?"

"It has the perfect emerald color," Stephen said.

"I know that, but somehow, to me — of course I am no judge — it lacks life."

"How can you, Jim?" said Ruth, sharply. "It is perfectly beautiful. Jewels are not alive."

"That is just it," said Jim. "I had a vague idea that they were. What do you think, Mr. Ward?"

"The perfect emerald tint," Stephen repeated. "As for the rest, I don't pretend to be exactly an expert on precious stones, though I might assume that I was on semi-precious."

"I have half a mind to take that ring to Lord & Lovejoy's to-morrow," said Jim, as he gave it back to Ruth.

She started and paled. "Jim, you can't," she cried.

"I hardly see how you can," said Stephen. "Lord & Lovejoy have such a reputation that it would amount to an insult."

"I suppose you are right," Jim said, doubtfully. "I suppose it would not do, and the stone must be just what they represented. I am no judge. Sometimes I think that education, generally speaking, should provide knowledge of things of such value."

"It is a magnificent ring," said Ruth, "and I shall refuse to take it off many more times. I shall begin to be superstitious."

After Jim and Ruth had gone for a little stroll in the moonlight, Ann looked at her brother. "What did

you think of that?" she asked.

"He is either absolutely above suspicion or the cleverest impostor of his generation," said Stephen. "Personally I have no doubt. The man simply does not know. Sometimes I wonder if —"

"What?"

"If he ought not, in common justice, to be told."

"Stephen, how could he be told without implying suspicion?"

"I confess I don't see," replied Stephen, thoughtfully. "If it was anything on earth except an engagement-ring, and if we were not so absolutely sure, in spite of this evidence, that the man is all right! I am sure of that. At first, before I had seen so much of him — I did not own it to you — but I doubted. Now I am as sure of him as I am of myself; perhaps I am surer. I am inclined to think a jury would find the case rather strong against me." Stephen laughed.

"Don't laugh, brother. It is dreadful, in spite of everything. How do you account for it?"

"I don't account for it. I have a firm opinion that there is a large class of incidents in this world beyond all known laws of accountability. I think poor Ruth's bogus emerald belongs to that class. We must simply put it out of our minds as much as possible, Ann."

"I see no other way, with the wedding next week," said Ann, miserably. "I hope everything will be right, and Ruth will be happy; but she is my only child, and to begin her matrimonial life with a sham gem for her betrothal-ring — Oh, Stephen, are you sure it is sham?"

"I wish I were not sure," Stephen said, fervently.

Ruth was married the next week. Not one word had been said to her about the ring after her conversation with her uncle. She had seemed radiantly happy. If she had a shade of distrust, she did not betray it; but she probably had none. Ruth was essentially feminine. She placed affection and emotion in the vanguard of her life. She was even capable of entirely dismissing reason and logic for the sake of preserving in integrity her affection and trust.

Ann thought sometimes that she did in this case. After the wedding, when the young couple had gone, she spoke of it to her brother.

"I really wonder if Ruth believes what you told her," she said. The two were sitting alone in the room sweet with Ruth's bridal flowers.

"She believes it, but she has hidden the belief from herself," said Stephen. "I know that type of woman, and Ruth is a perfect specimen of it."

"I hope she will be happy."

"It will take more than a sham emerald to make her unhappy with a man whom she loves as she loves Jim," replied Stephen. "If there is any alchemy in faith and love, Ruth will have that stone pure emerald

before she has done with it. She will be happy. Don't worry, Ann."

Stephen was right. Ruth was entirely happy in her new life. She and Jim had been married nearly two years before the next unexplainable thing happened about the ring with the green stone. Ruth and Jim had just come to Ann's place for the summer, and Stephen noticed at once that Ruth was not wearing the ring. She spoke about it to him the next day. She looked confused, which was unusual for her.

"Are you going to the city to-day, Uncle Stephen?" she said.

Jim had already left on an early train, and she and her uncle were alone on the porch. Ann was busy in the house. Stephen detected an anxious note in the girl's voice.

"Why, yes, I thought I would go," he replied. "I have a little matter of business to attend to, and it is a good day, not too hot. Anything you want me to do?"

Ruth hesitated. She even flushed a little. "If you are sure it will not bother you, I do wish you would leave my ring, my engagement-ring, you know" — Ruth's voice was hesitant — "at Lord & Lovejoy's. My finger is larger. You know I have gained a little flesh. Lately, when Jim has not been at home to notice it, I have not worn it. It has hurt me. I could not get it on yesterday. Jim did not notice, and I was glad. I want the setting enlarged just a little. I have the piece which they took from the original setting, you know. They said it had better be kept in case it ever needed changing."

"I will be glad to take the ring to Lord & Lovejoy's, my dear," said Stephen. Inwardly he realized a rueful sensation. He had been almost convinced that he had been an object of suspicion to some of the gentlemen in that jewelry firm. He made no comment on the fact that Jim had not been told of the tightness of the ring, and had not been commissioned to do the errand. "Get the ring, my dear," said Stephen. "I am going on the eleven-five train."

Before leaving, Stephen had a chance for a word with his sister. He told her of Ruth's request.

Ann looked anxious. "Somehow I dislike to have that ring taken anywhere, or brought into discussion again," said she. "Ruth seems so perfectly happy in her married life, and that ring with its green stone has always seemed to me a danger-mark."

"Don't worry, Ann," said Stephen. "Nothing can come of it unless Lord & Lovejoy have me arrested on suspicion."

"Oh, Stephen!"

"I don't think they will," said Stephen, reassuringly. "I was really the only person whom Ruth could ask to do the errand, you know."

"Yes, I do know," said Ann, "but it is rather hard on you, Stephen. Why don't you take the ring to another place?"

"Oh, it is a particular piece of work, and that is the best place in the city. And, besides, on the whole, I find it rather amusing to be suspected."

Stephen grinned and got into the car which was to take him to the station. He returned on an

unexpectedly early train. He found the house very quiet. The day had proved warm, after all. Everybody except the servants was lying down. Stephen went directly to his sister's door and rapped.

"It is Stephen," he said, warily. "Put on a dressing-gown and come down to the library. I have something important to tell you."

When Ann in her white-silk negligée entered the library, her brother spoke at once. "Ann," he said, "I verily believe Satan himself has a finger in that affair of the ring with the green stone. What do you think has happened now?"

"What?" Ann gasped.

"Don't be frightened. I don't think it is anything to be frightened about unless you are scared of the occult. However, the affair has savored of the occult all through. Ann, that green stone is an emerald!"

Ann stared at him, her face paling.

"And not only that, but the emerald, the original emerald."

"Stephen!"

"All suspicion seems now removed from me, but, unluckily, it centers elsewhere. I was even asked very delicately concerning poor Jim's success in his profession. It was hinted, so delicately as to suggest the thought of butterflies' wings, that money could have been raised on such a valuable stone, and then, when the financial pressure was removed, the stone restored."

"Stephen, that is monstrous. What did you say?"

"I also used butterflies' wings for defense, and, I believe, swerved suspicion from Jim. I am inclined to think that now Lord & Lovejoy share my opinion concerning a large number of unexplainable events in the world. Mr. Lovejoy even went the length of saying that jewels were queer things, and that queer things happened. I left the firm titillated by mystery."

"Shall you tell Ruth?"

"I ask you that."

"Stephen, I don't know. Her faith in Jim is so beautiful. She has believed so, in spite of the evidence of reason and common sense, that I am not sure she has not been wearing a jewel more precious than any on earth. She will, of course, say, when she knows, that everybody has been mistaken. All that wonderful faith, in the face of everything, will lose its value. Stephen, are you sure you were right?"

"Sure that the stone I first saw was not an emerald? I wish I were as sure of anything else. Ann, I know. That was no emerald which I carried to Lord & Lovejoy's two years ago."

"But you don't think that Jim —"

"Pawned it? Not for a second. It is simply another incident of that unexplainable class. Shall I tell Ruth?"

“Let me think of it overnight.”

But Ann thought of it longer, for that night Jim and Ruth were summoned by a telegram to the little suburban village where Charlotte Gordon had her permanent home. She had been staying with her son in the city for several weeks, and had gone home when they went for the summer to Ruth's mother's place.

Charlotte Gordon had been seized by her last illness. She died in a week's time, and it was two weeks before the family were settled into a saddened peace for the summer. Jim had worshiped his mother, and Ruth had grown very fond of her.

It was three weeks after Charlotte had been buried that the third incident happened with regard to the ring, or as all, with the exception of Jim himself, thought with regard to the ring. He did not know. He never knew.

One evening he came down-stairs bringing a tiny box. He went to Stephen with it. “I found this in poor mother's jewel-casket,” he said. “She had some valuable jewelry; not much, but good. This puzzled me. It was in a box by itself. See what you think of it, Uncle Stephen.”

Stephen opened the box. Inside was a tiny twist of green tissue-paper on a bed of green jeweler's cotton. Stephen carefully untwisted the paper. They were all out on the vine-screened porch. They crowded around to look. Stephen held between his thumb and forefinger a large, green stone. He felt a thrill of horror. He knew that stone. He glanced at Ann. She looked pale and frightened. Ruth looked excited. Jim was the only one who wore the natural expression of simple curiosity.

“Is it an emerald?” Jim asked. “It is the same color as Ruth's emerald.”

“It is the same color, but it is not an emerald,” replied Stephen.

“The light is very dim here,” said Ruth.

“That makes no difference. It is not an emerald.”

Ruth looked triumphantly at the ring on her finger. “Then — this —” she began.

Ann interrupted her daughter. She held a letter in her hand. She looked pale and solemn. “I have a letter here which I must read,” she said. She turned to Jim. “It is from your mother,” she said. “She had it sent to me with the request that I read it to all of you. It is not exactly a letter, but a statement. I hesitate to read it because, although she excuses him, it may involve your father, Jim.”

Jim started. “Read it,” he said, grimly. His father had died when he was a mere boy. His memory of him was loyal, but not wholly tending to admiration. “It is high time this ghastly green mystery is cleared up if it can be,” said Jim Gordon. “It now concerns the living, and the living are more to be considered than the dead. And, after all, the dead are protected by the consideration of all honorable souls.”

Ann read. There were only a few lines. There was no preface. It began abruptly:

“I think it was an emerald at first. I am sure my lover then, my husband now, did not give me a spurious stone. I must always hold to that belief. He had plenty of money. His family had the reputation of miserliness, but he could not have given me at the very first an imitation emerald. Everything points like a dreadful finger straight at my common sense that he did, but I will not believe. He bought it at Lord & Lovejoy's. I will not believe. Then the ring was too tight. I took it myself to a jeweler — not Lord & Lovejoy's — another. He told me. I had the setting enlarged. I wore the ring. I never spoke. The child came. My husband died. I waited a little while; then I went to the same jeweler, and old man with whom my own father used to deal. He took this poor green stone out of the setting, and I wore the setting without it. People wondered, but I did not care. The setting at least was good, even wonderful. People thought I had lost the stone. Then Jim became engaged to Ruth. I wanted to prove the girl. I wanted my son to have a better than his poor father had. Loyalty is worth more than any gem on earth. I should have kept my poor husband beyond suspicion in my own heart, since I was his wife. I had my chance. I went to my jeweler. Ruth has stood the test. Now she has the emerald, I leave the stone which I had taken from my own ring, unworthily taken, with the injunction that he believe in the unbelievable, that he believes in reasons so great to justify everything that he holds sacred the memory of his father for the sake of his mother who failed him.

“And I bid him thank God for his wife, who holds him above the evidence of her own reason triumphant over the sins which he might have committed.”

It ended abruptly. Suddenly the situation became illuminated by a light which sanctified it. They all saw the poor woman who had finished her life on earth, who had been deceived, and whose love had not stood the test of deception, that last fiery test for love of first water. They saw her putting another woman to that same test, and proving the possibility of a love past all logic and reason, the most precious gem of the earth.

Ruth held up her hand, and the great emerald gleamed wonderfully. In its green depths, which seemed fathomless, could be imagined tossing seas, magic springtide of youth, all gracious fancies and romances for which the lovely color served as keynote.

“Put away your poor mother's stone very carefully,” said Ruth, with tears in her eyes. “It seems to me that her love and suffering and death have made it a real emerald, after all, and made it true that your father gave it to her. Put away your mother's emerald very carefully, Jim dear, just as she kept it.”

FLUSH OF GOLD

Lon McFane was a bit grumpy, what of losing his tobacco pouch, or else he might have told me, before we got to it, something about the cabin at Surprise Lake. All day, turn and turn about, we had spelled each other at going to the fore and breaking trail for the dogs. It was heavy snowshoe work, and did not tend to make a man voluble, yet Lon McFane might have found breath enough at noon, when we stopped to boil coffee, with which to tell me. But he didn't. Surprise Lake?--it was Surprise Cabin to me. I had never heard of it before. I confess I was a bit tired. I had been looking for Lon to stop and make camp any time for an

hour; but I had too much pride to suggest making camp or to ask him his intentions; and yet he was my man, lured at a handsome wage to mush my dogs for me and to obey my commands. I guess I was a bit grumpy myself. He said nothing, and I was resolved to ask nothing, even if we tramped on all night.

We came upon the cabin abruptly. For a week of trail we had met no one, and, in my mind, there had been little likelihood of meeting any one for a week to come. And yet there it was, right before my eyes, a cabin, with a dim light in the window and smoke curling up from the chimney.

“Why didn’t you tell me—” I began, but was interrupted by Lon, who muttered—

“Surprise Lake—it lies up a small feeder half a mile on. It’s only a pond.”

“Yes, but the cabin—who lives in it?”

“A woman,” was the answer, and the next moment Lon had rapped on the door, and a woman’s voice bade him enter.

“Have you seen Dave recently?” she asked.

“Nope,” Lon answered carelessly. “I’ve been in the other direction, down Circle City way. Dave’s up Dawson way, ain’t he?”

The woman nodded, and Lon fell to unharnessing the dogs, while I unlashed the sled and carried the camp outfit into the cabin. The cabin was a large, one-room affair, and the woman was evidently alone in it. She pointed to the stove, where water was already boiling, and Lon set about the preparation of supper, while I opened the fish-bag and fed the dogs. I looked for Lon to introduce us, and was vexed that he did not, for they were evidently old friends.

“You are Lon McFane, aren’t you?” I heard her ask him. “Why, I remember you now. The last time I saw you it was on a steamboat, wasn’t it? I remember . . .”

Her speech seemed suddenly to be frozen by the spectacle of dread which, I knew, from the tenor I saw mounting in her eyes, must be on her inner vision. To my astonishment, Lon was affected by her words and manner. His face showed desperate, for all his voice sounded hearty and genial, as he said—

“The last time we met was at Dawson, Queen’s Jubilee, or Birthday, or something—don’t you remember?—the canoe races in the river, and the obstacle races down the main street?”

The terror faded out of her eyes and her whole body relaxed. "Oh, yes, I do remember," she said. "And you won one of the canoe races."

"How's Dave been makin' it lately? Strikin' it as rich as ever, I suppose?" Lon asked, with apparent irrelevance.

She smiled and nodded, and then, noticing that I had unlashed the bed roll, she indicated the end of the cabin where I might spread it. Her own bunk, I noticed, was made up at the opposite end.

"I thought it was Dave coming when I heard your dogs," she said.

After that she said nothing, contenting herself with watching Lon's cooking operations, and listening the while as for the sound of dogs along the trail. I lay back on the blankets and smoked and watched. Here was mystery; I could make that much out, but no more could I make out. Why in the deuce hadn't Lon given me the tip before we arrived? I looked at her face, unnoticed by her, and the longer I looked the harder it was to take my eyes away. It was a wonderfully beautiful face, unearthly, I may say, with a light in it or an expression or something "that was never on land or sea." Fear and terror had completely vanished, and it was a placidly beautiful face—if by "placid" one can characterize that intangible and occult something that I cannot say was a radiance or a light any more than I can say it was an expression.

Abruptly, as if for the first time, she became aware of my presence.

"Have you seen Dave recently?" she asked me. It was on the tip of my tongue to say "Dave who?" when Lon coughed in the smoke that arose from the sizzling bacon. The bacon might have caused that cough, but I took it as a hint and left my question unasked. "No, I haven't," I answered. "I'm new in this part of the country—"

"But you don't mean to say," she interrupted, "that you've never heard of Dave—of Big Dave Walsh?"

"You see," I apologised, "I'm new in the country. I've put in most of my time in the Lower Country, down Nome way."

"Tell him about Dave," she said to Lon.

Lon seemed put out, but he began in that hearty, genial manner that I had noticed before. It seemed a shade too hearty and genial, and it irritated me.

"Oh, Dave is a fine man," he said. "He's a man, every inch of him, and he stands six feet four in his socks. His word is as good as his bond. The man lies who ever says Dave told a lie, and that man will have to fight with me, too, as well—if there's anything left of him when Dave

gets done with him. For Dave is a fighter. Oh, yes, he's a scrapper from way back. He got a grizzly with a '38 popgun. He got clawed some, but he knew what he was doin'. He went into the cave on purpose to get that grizzly. 'Fraid of nothing. Free an' easy with his money, or his last shirt an' match when out of money. Why, he drained Surprise Lake here in three weeks an' took out ninety thousand, didn't he?" She flushed and nodded her head proudly. Through his recital she had followed every word with keenest interest. "An' I must say," Lon went on, "that I was disappointed sore on not meeting Dave here to-night."

Lon served supper at one end of the table of whip-sawed spruce, and we fell to eating. A howling of the dogs took the woman to the door. She opened it an inch and listened.

"Where is Dave Walsh?" I asked, in an undertone.

"Dead," Lon answered. "In hell, maybe. I don't know. Shut up."

"But you just said that you expected to meet him here to-night," I challenged.

"Oh, shut up, can't you," was Lon's reply, in the same cautious undertone.

The woman had closed the door and was returning, and I sat and meditated upon the fact that this man who told me to shut up received from me a salary of two hundred and fifty dollars a month and his board.

Lon washed the dishes, while I smoked and watched the woman. She seemed more beautiful than ever—strangely and weirdly beautiful, it is true. After looking at her steadfastly for five minutes, I was compelled to come back to the real world and to glance at Lon McFane. This enabled me to know, without discussion, that the woman, too, was real. At first I had taken her for the wife of Dave Walsh; but if Dave Walsh were dead, as Lon had said, then she could be only his widow.

It was early to bed, for we faced a long day on the morrow; and as Lon crawled in beside me under the blankets, I ventured a question.

"That woman's crazy, isn't she?"

"Crazy as a loon," he answered.

And before I could formulate my next question, Lon McFane, I swear, was off to sleep. He always went to sleep that way—just crawled into the blankets, closed his eyes, and was off, a demure little heavy breathing rising on the air. Lon never snored.

And in the morning it was quick breakfast, feed the dogs, load the sled,

and hit the trail. We said good-bye as we pulled out, and the woman stood in the doorway and watched us off. I carried the vision of her unearthly beauty away with me, just under my eyelids, and all I had to do, any time, was to close them and see her again. The way was unbroken, Surprise Lake being far off the travelled trails, and Lon and I took turn about at beating down the feathery snow with our big, webbed shoes so that the dogs could travel. "But you said you expected to meet Dave Walsh at the cabin," trembled on the tip of my tongue a score of times. I did not utter it. I could wait until we knocked off in the middle of the day. And when the middle of the day came, we went right on, for, as Lon explained, there was a camp of moose hunters at the forks of the Teelee, and we could make there by dark. But we didn't make there by dark, for Bright, the lead-dog, broke his shoulder-blade, and we lost an hour over him before we shot him. Then, crossing a timber jam on the frozen bed of the Teelee, the sled suffered a wrenching capsize, and it was a case of make camp and repair the runner. I cooked supper and fed the dogs while Lon made the repairs, and together we got in the night's supply of ice and firewood. Then we sat on our blankets, our moccasins steaming on upended sticks before the fire, and had our evening smoke.

"You didn't know her?" Lon queried suddenly. I shook my head.

"You noticed the colour of her hair and eyes and her complexion, well, that's where she got her name—she was like the first warm glow of a golden sunrise. She was called Flush of Gold. Ever heard of her?"

Somewhere I had a confused and misty remembrance of having heard the name, yet it meant nothing to me. "Flush of Gold," I repeated; "sounds like the name of a dance-house girl." Lon shook his head. "No, she was a good woman, at least in that sense, though she sinned greatly just the same."

"But why do you speak always of her in the past tense, as though she were dead?"

"Because of the darkness on her soul that is the same as the darkness of death. The Flush of Gold that I knew, that Dawson knew, and that Forty Mile knew before that, is dead. That dumb, lunatic creature we saw last night was not Flush of Gold."

"And Dave?" I queried.

"He built that cabin," Lon answered, "He built it for her . . . and for himself. He is dead. She is waiting for him there. She half believes he is not dead. But who can know the whim of a crazed mind? Maybe she wholly believes he is not dead. At any rate, she waits for him there in the cabin he built. Who would rouse the dead? Then who would rouse the living that are dead? Not I, and that is why I let on to expect to meet Dave Walsh there last night. I'll bet a stack that I'd a been more

surprised than she if I _had_ met him there last night.”

“I do not understand,” I said. “Begin at the beginning, as a white man should, and tell me the whole tale.”

And Lon began. “Victor Chauvet was an old Frenchman—born in the south of France. He came to California in the days of gold. He was a pioneer. He found no gold, but, instead, became a maker of bottled sunshine—in short, a grape-grower and wine-maker. Also, he followed gold excitements. That is what brought him to Alaska in the early days, and over the Chilcoot and down the Yukon long before the Carmack strike. The old town site of Ten Mile was Chauvet’s. He carried the first mail into Arctic City. He staked those coal-mines on the Porcupine a dozen years ago. He grubstaked Loftus into the Nippennuck Country. Now it happened that Victor Chauvet was a good Catholic, loving two things in this world, wine and woman. Wine of all kinds he loved, but of woman, only one, and she was the mother of Marie Chauvet.”

Here I groaned aloud, having meditated beyond self-control over the fact that I paid this man two hundred and fifty dollars a month.

“What’s the matter now?” he demanded.

“Matter?” I complained. “I thought you were telling the story of Flush of Gold. I don’t want a biography of your old French wine-bibber.”

Lon calmly lighted his pipe, took one good puff, then put the pipe aside. “And you asked me to begin at the beginning,” he said.

“Yes,” said I; “the beginning.”

“And the beginning of Flush of Gold is the old French wine-bibber, for he was the father of Marie Chauvet, and Marie Chauvet was the Flush of Gold. What more do you want? Victor Chauvet never had much luck to speak of. He managed to live, and to get along, and to take good care of Marie, who resembled the one woman he had loved. He took very good care of her. Flush of Gold was the pet name he gave her. Flush of Gold Creek was named after her—Flush of Gold town site, too. The old man was great on town sites, only he never landed them.

“Now, honestly,” Lon said, with one of his lightning changes, “you’ve seen her, what do you think of her—of her looks, I mean? How does she strike your beauty sense?”

“She is remarkably beautiful,” I said. “I never saw anything like her in my life. In spite of the fact, last night, that I guessed she was mad, I could not keep my eyes off of her. It wasn’t curiosity. It was wonder, sheer wonder, she was so strangely beautiful.”

“She was more strangely beautiful before the darkness fell upon her,” Lon said softly. “She was truly the Flush of Gold. She turned all men’s hearts . . . and heads. She recalls, with an effort, that I once won a canoe race at Dawson—I, who once loved her, and was told by her of her love for me. It was her beauty that made all men love her. She’d ’a’ got the apple from Paris, on application, and there wouldn’t have been any Trojan War, and to top it off she’d have thrown Paris down. And now she lives in darkness, and she who was always fickle, for the first time is constant—and constant to a shade, to a dead man she does not realize is dead.

“And this is the way it was. You remember what I said last night of Dave Walsh—Big Dave Walsh? He was all that I said, and more, many times more. He came into this country in the late eighties—that’s a pioneer for you. He was twenty years old then. He was a young bull. When he was twenty-five he could lift clear of the ground thirteen fifty-pound sacks of flour. At first, each fall of the year, famine drove him out. It was a lone land in those days. No river steamboats, no grub, nothing but salmon bellies and rabbit tracks. But after famine chased him out three years, he said he’d had enough of being chased; and the next year he stayed. He lived on straight meat when he was lucky enough to get it; he ate eleven dogs that winter; but he stayed. And the next winter he stayed, and the next. He never did leave the country again. He was a bull, a great bull. He could kill the strongest man in the country with hard work. He could outpack a Chilcat Indian, he could outpaddle a Stick, and he could travel all day with wet feet when the thermometer registered fifty below zero, and that’s going some, I tell you, for vitality. You’d freeze your feet at twenty-five below if you wet them and tried to keep on.

“Dave Walsh was a bull for strength. And yet he was soft and easy-natured. Anybody could do him, the latest short-horn in camp could lie his last dollar out of him. ‘But it doesn’t worry me,’ he had a way of laughing off his softness; ‘it doesn’t keep me awake nights.’ Now don’t get the idea that he had no backbone. You remember about the bear he went after with the popgun. When it came to fighting Dave was the blamedest ever. He was the limit, if by that I may describe his unlimitedness when he got into action, he was easy and kind with the weak, but the strong had to give trail when he went by. And he was a man that men liked, which is the finest word of all, a man’s man.

“Dave never took part in the big stampede to Dawson when Carmack made the Bonanza strike. You see, Dave was just then over on Mammon Creek strikin’ it himself. He discovered Mammon Creek. Cleaned eighty-four thousand up that winter, and opened up the claim so that it promised a couple of hundred thousand for the next winter. Then, summer bein’ on and the ground sloshy, he took a trip up the Yukon to Dawson to see what Carmack’s strike looked like. And there he saw Flush of Gold. I remember the night. I shall always remember. It was something sudden,

and it makes one shiver to think of a strong man with all the strength withered out of him by one glance from the soft eyes of a weak, blond, female creature like Flush of Gold. It was at her dad's cabin, old Victor Chauvet's. Some friend had brought Dave along to talk over town sites on Mammon Creek. But little talking did he do, and what he did was mostly gibberish. I tell you the sight of Flush of Gold had sent Dave clean daffy. Old Victor Chauvet insisted after Dave left that he had been drunk. And so he had. He was drunk, but Flush of Gold was the strong drink that made him so.

“That settled it, that first glimpse he caught of her. He did not start back down the Yukon in a week, as he had intended. He lingered on a month, two months, all summer. And we who had suffered understood, and wondered what the outcome would be. Undoubtedly, in our minds, it seemed that Flush of Gold had met her master. And why not? There was romance sprinkled all over Dave Walsh. He was a Mammon King, he had made the Mammon Creek strike; he was an old sour dough, one of the oldest pioneers in the land—men turned to look at him when he went by, and said to one another in awed undertones, ‘There goes Dave Walsh.’ And why not? He stood six feet four; he had yellow hair himself that curled on his neck; and he was a bull—a yellow-maned bull just turned thirty-one.

“And Flush of Gold loved him, and, having danced him through a whole summer's courtship, at the end their engagement was made known. The fall of the year was at hand, Dave had to be back for the winter's work on Mammon Creek, and Flush of Gold refused to be married right away. Dave put Dusky Burns in charge of the Mammon Creek claim, and himself lingered on in Dawson. Little use. She wanted her freedom a while longer; she must have it, and she would not marry until next year. And so, on the first ice, Dave Walsh went alone down the Yukon behind his dogs, with the understanding that the marriage would take place when he arrived on the first steamboat of the next year.

“Now Dave was as true as the Pole Star, and she was as false as a magnetic needle in a cargo of loadstone. Dave was as steady and solid as she was fickle and fly-away, and in some way Dave, who never doubted anybody, doubted her. It was the jealousy of his love, perhaps, and maybe it was the message ticked off from her soul to his; but at any rate Dave was worried by fear of her inconstancy. He was afraid to trust her till the next year, he had so to trust her, and he was pretty well beside himself. Some of it I got from old Victor Chauvet afterwards, and from all that I have pieced together I conclude that there was something of a scene before Dave pulled north with his dogs. He stood up before the old Frenchman, with Flush of Gold beside him, and announced that they were plighted to each other. He was very dramatic, with fire in his eyes, old Victor said. He talked something about ‘until death do us part’; and old Victor especially remembered that at one place Dave took her by the shoulder with his great paw and almost shook her as he said: ‘Even unto death are you mine, and I would rise from the grave to claim you.’ Old

Victor distinctly remembered those words ‘Even unto death are you mine, and I would rise from the grave to claim you.’ And he told me afterwards that Flush of Gold was pretty badly frightened, and that he afterwards took Dave to one side privately and told him that that wasn’t the way to hold Flush of Gold—that he must humour her and gentle her if he wanted to keep her.

“There is no discussion in my mind but that Flush of Gold was frightened. She was a savage herself in her treatment of men, while men had always treated her as a soft and tender and too utterly-utter something that must not be hurt. She didn’t know what harshness was . . . until Dave Walsh, standing his six feet four, a big bull, gripped her and pawed her and assured her that she was his until death, and then some. And besides, in Dawson, that winter, was a music-player—one of those macaroni-eating, greasy-tenor-Eye-talian-dago propositions—and Flush of Gold lost her heart to him. Maybe it was only fascination—I don’t know. Sometimes it seems to me that she really did love Dave Walsh. Perhaps it was because he had frightened her with that even-unto-death, rise-from-the-grave stunt of his that she in the end inclined to the dago music-player. But it is all guesswork, and the facts are, sufficient. He wasn’t a dago; he was a Russian count—this was straight; and he wasn’t a professional piano-player or anything of the sort. He played the violin and the piano, and he sang—sang well—but it was for his own pleasure and for the pleasure of those he sang for. He had money, too—and right here let me say that Flush of Gold never cared a rap for money. She was fickle, but she was never sordid.

“But to be getting along. She was plighted to Dave, and Dave was coming up on the first steamboat to get her—that was the summer of ’98, and the first steamboat was to be expected the middle of June. And Flush of Gold was afraid to throw Dave down and face him afterwards. It was all planned suddenly. The Russian music-player, the Count, was her obedient slave. She planned it, I know. I learned as much from old Victor afterwards. The Count took his orders from her, and caught that first steamboat down. It was the Golden Rocket. And so did Flush of Gold catch it. And so did I. I was going to Circle City, and I was flabbergasted when I found Flush of Gold on board. I didn’t see her name down on the passenger list. She was with the Count fellow all the time, happy and smiling, and I noticed that the Count fellow was down on the list as having his wife along. There it was, state-room, number, and all. The first I knew that he was married, only I didn’t see anything of the wife . . . unless Flush of Gold was so counted. I wondered if they’d got married ashore before starting. There’d been talk about them in Dawson, you see, and bets had been laid that the Count fellow had cut Dave out.

“I talked with the purser. He didn’t know anything more about it than I did; he didn’t know Flush of Gold, anyway, and besides, he was almost rushed to death. You know what a Yukon steamboat is, but you can’t guess

what the Golden Rocket was when it left Dawson that June of 1898. She was a hummer. Being the first steamer out, she carried all the scurvy patients and hospital wrecks. Then she must have carried a couple of millions of Klondike dust and nuggets, to say nothing of a packed and jammed passenger list, deck passengers galore, and bucks and squaws and dogs without end. And she was loaded down to the guards with freight and baggage. There was a mountain of the same on the fore-lower-deck, and each little stop along the way added to it. I saw the box come aboard at Teelee Portage, and I knew it for what it was, though I little guessed the joker that was in it. And they piled it on top of everything else on the fore-lower-deck, and they didn't pile it any too securely either. The mate expected to come back to it again, and then forgot about it. I thought at the time that there was something familiar about the big husky dog that climbed over the baggage and freight and lay down next to the box. And then we passed the Glendale, bound up for Dawson. As she saluted us, I thought of Dave on board of her and hurrying to Dawson to Flush of Gold. I turned and looked at her where she stood by the rail. Her eyes were bright, but she looked a bit frightened by the sight of the other steamer, and she was leaning closely to the Count fellow as for protection. She needn't have leaned so safely against him, and I needn't have been so sure of a disappointed Dave Walsh arriving at Dawson. For Dave Walsh wasn't on the Glendale. There were a lot of things I didn't know, but was soon to know—for instance, that the pair were not yet married. Inside half an hour preparations for the marriage took place. What of the sick men in the main cabin, and of the crowded condition of the Golden Rocket, the likeliest place for the ceremony was found forward, on the lower deck, in an open space next to the rail and gang-plank and shaded by the mountain of freight with the big box on top and the sleeping dog beside it. There was a missionary on board, getting off at Eagle City, which was the next step, so they had to use him quick. That's what they'd planned to do, get married on the boat.

“But I've run ahead of the facts. The reason Dave Walsh wasn't on the Glendale was because he was on the Golden Rocket. It was this way. After loiterin' in Dawson on account of Flush of Gold, he went down to Mammon Creek on the ice. And there he found Dusky Burns doing so well with the claim, there was no need for him to be around. So he put some grub on the sled, harnessed the dogs, took an Indian along, and pulled out for Surprise Lake. He always had a liking for that section. Maybe you don't know how the creek turned out to be a four-flusher; but the prospects were good at the time, and Dave proceeded to build his cabin and hers. That's the cabin we slept in. After he finished it, he went off on a moose hunt to the forks of the Teelee, takin' the Indian along.

“And this is what happened. Came on a cold snap. The juice went down forty, fifty, sixty below zero. I remember that snap—I was at Forty Mile; and I remember the very day. At eleven o'clock in the morning the spirit thermometer at the N. A. T. & T. Company's store went down to seventy-five below zero. And that morning, near the forks of the Teelee,

Dave Walsh was out after moose with that blessed Indian of his. I got it all from the Indian afterwards—we made a trip over the ice together to Dyea. That morning Mr. Indian broke through the ice and wet himself to the waist. Of course he began to freeze right away. The proper thing was to build a fire. But Dave Walsh was a bull. It was only half a mile to camp, where a fire was already burning. What was the good of building another? He threw Mr. Indian over his shoulder—and ran with him—half a mile—with the thermometer at seventy-five below. You know what that means. Suicide. There's no other name for it. Why, that buck Indian weighed over two hundred himself, and Dave ran half a mile with him. Of course he froze his lungs. Must have frozen them near solid. It was a tomfool trick for any man to do. And anyway, after lingering horribly for several weeks, Dave Walsh died.

“The Indian didn't know what to do with the corpse. Ordinarily he'd have buried him and let it go at that. But he knew that Dave Walsh was a big man, worth lots of money, a hi-yu skookum chief. Likewise he'd seen the bodies of other hi-yu skookums carted around the country like they were worth something. So he decided to take Dave's body to Forty Mile, which was Dave's headquarters. You know how the ice is on the grass roots in this country—well, the Indian planted Dave under a foot of soil—in short, he put Dave on ice. Dave could have stayed there a thousand years and still been the same old Dave. You understand—just the same as a refrigerator. Then the Indian brings over a whipsaw from the cabin at Surprise Lake and makes lumber enough for the box. Also, waiting for the thaw, he goes out and shoots about ten thousand pounds of moose. This he keeps on ice, too. Came the thaw. The Teelee broke. He built a raft and loaded it with the meat, the big box with Dave inside, and Dave's team of dogs, and away they went down the Teelee.

“The raft got caught on a timber jam and hung up two days. It was scorching hot weather, and Mr. Indian nearly lost his moose meat. So when he got to Teelee Portage he figured a steamboat would get to Forty Mile quicker than his raft. He transferred his cargo, and there you are, fore-lower deck of the Golden Rocket, Flush of Gold being married, and Dave Walsh in his big box casting the shade for her. And there's one thing I clean forgot. No wonder I thought the husky dog that came aboard at Teelee Portage was familiar. It was Pee-lat, Dave Walsh's lead-dog and favourite—a terrible fighter, too. He was lying down beside the box.

“Flush of Gold caught sight of me, called me over, shook hands with me, and introduced me to the Count. She was beautiful. I was as mad for her then as ever. She smiled into my eyes and said I must sign as one of the witnesses. And there was no refusing her. She was ever a child, cruel as children are cruel. Also, she told me she was in possession of the only two bottles of champagne in Dawson—or that had been in Dawson the night before; and before I knew it I was scheduled to drink her and the Count's health. Everybody crowded round, the captain of the steamboat, very prominent, trying to ring in on the wine, I guess. It was a funny

wedding. On the upper deck the hospital wrecks, with various feet in the grave, gathered and looked down to see. There were Indians all jammed in the circle, too, big bucks, and their squaws and kids, to say nothing of about twenty-five snarling wolf-dogs. The missionary lined the two of them up and started in with the service. And just then a dog-fight started, high up on the pile of freight—Pee-lat lying beside the big box, and a white-haired brute belonging to one of the Indians. The fight wasn't explosive at all. The brutes just snarled at each other from a distance—tapping at each other long-distance, you know, saying dast and dasset, dast and dasset. The noise was rather disturbing, but you could hear the missionary's voice above it.

“There was no particularly easy way of getting at the two dogs, except from the other side of the pile. But nobody was on that side—everybody watching the ceremony, you see. Even then everything might have been all right if the captain hadn't thrown a club at the dogs. That was what precipitated everything. As I say, if the captain hadn't thrown that club, nothing might have happened.

“The missionary had just reached the point where he was saying ‘In sickness and in health,’ and ‘Till death us do part.’ And just then the captain threw the club. I saw the whole thing. It landed on Pee-lat, and at that instant the white brute jumped him. The club caused it. Their two bodies struck the box, and it began to slide, its lower end tilting down. It was a long oblong box, and it slid down slowly until it reached the perpendicular, when it came down on the run. The onlookers on that side the circle had time to get out from under. Flush of Gold and the Count, on the opposite side of the circle, were facing the box; the missionary had his back to it. The box must have fallen ten feet straight up and down, and it hit end on.

“Now mind you, not one of us knew that Dave Walsh was dead. We thought he was on the Glendale, bound for Dawson. The missionary had edged off to one side, and so Flush of Gold faced the box when it struck. It was like in a play. It couldn't have been better planned. It struck on end, and on the right end; the whole front of the box came off; and out swept Dave Walsh on his feet, partly wrapped in a blanket, his yellow hair flying and showing bright in the sun. Right out of the box, on his feet, he swept upon Flush of Gold. She didn't know he was dead, but it was unmistakable, after hanging up two days on a timber jam, that he was rising all right from the dead to claim her. Possibly that is what she thought. At any rate, the sight froze her. She couldn't move. She just sort of wilted and watched Dave Walsh coming for her! And he got her. It looked almost as though he threw his arms around her, but whether or not this happened, down to the deck they went together. We had to drag Dave Walsh's body clear before we could get hold of her. She was in a faint, but it would have been just as well if she had never come out of that faint; for when she did, she fell to screaming the way insane people do. She kept it up for hours, till she was exhausted. Oh, yes, she

recovered. You saw her last night, and know how much recovered she is. She is not violent, it is true, but she lives in darkness. She believes that she is waiting for Dave Walsh, and so she waits in the cabin he built for her. She is no longer fickle. It is nine years now that she has been faithful to Dave Walsh, and the outlook is that she'll be faithful to him to the end."

Lon McFane pulled down the top of the blankets and prepared to crawl in.

"We have her grub hauled to her each year," he added, "and in general keep an eye on her. Last night was the first time she ever recognized me, though."

"Who are the we?" I asked.

"Oh," was the answer, "the Count and old Victor Chauvet and me. Do you know, I think the Count is the one to be really sorry for. Dave Walsh never did know that she was false to him. And she does not suffer. Her darkness is merciful to her."

I lay silently under the blankets for the space of a minute.

"Is the Count still in the country?" I asked.

But there was a gentle sound of heavy breathing, and I knew Lon McFane was asleep.

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THE WONDERFUL STONE

In the prefecture of Shun-t'ien[242] there lived a man named Hsing Yün-fei, who was an amateur mineralogist and would pay any price for a good specimen. One day as he was fishing in the river, something caught his net, and diving down he brought up a stone about a foot in diameter, beautifully carved on all sides to resemble clustering hills and peaks. He was quite as pleased with this as if he had found some precious stone; and having had an elegant sandal-wood stand made for it, he set his prize upon the table. Whenever it was about to rain, clouds, which from a distance looked like new cotton wool, would come forth from each of the holes or grottoes on the stone, and appear to close them up. By-and-by an influential personage called at the house and begged to see the stone, immediately seizing it and handing it over to a lusty servant, at the same time whipping his horse and riding away. Hsing was in despair; but all he could do was to mourn the loss of his stone, and indulge his anger against the thief.

Meanwhile, the servant, who had carried off the stone on his back, stopped to rest at a bridge; when all of a sudden his hand slipped and the stone fell into the water. His master was extremely put out at this, and gave him a sound beating; subsequently hiring several divers, who tried every means in their power to recover the stone, but were quite unable to find it. He then went away, having first published a notice of reward, and by these means many were tempted to seek for the stone. Soon after, Hsing himself came to the spot, and as he mournfully approached the bank, lo! the water became clear, and he could see the stone lying at the bottom. Taking off his clothes he quickly jumped in and brought it out, together with the sandal-wood stand which was still with it. He carried it off home, but being no longer desirous of shewing it to people, he had an inner room cleaned and put it in there. Some time afterwards an old man knocked at the door and asked to be allowed to see the stone; whereupon Hsing replied that he had lost it a long time ago. "Isn't that it in the inner room?" said the old man, smiling. "Oh, walk in and see for yourself if you don't believe me," answered Hsing; and the old man did walk in, and there was the stone on the table. This took Hsing very much aback; and the old man then laid his hand upon the stone and said, "This is an old family relic of mine: I lost it many months since. How does it come to be here? I pray you now restore it to me." Hsing didn't know what to say, but declared he was the owner of the stone; upon which the old man remarked, "If it is really yours, what evidence can you bring to prove it?" Hsing made no reply; and the old man continued, "To show you that I know this stone, I may mention that it has altogether ninety-two grottoes, and that in the largest of these are five words:--

'A stone from Heaven above.'"

Hsing looked and found that there were actually some small characters, no larger than grains of rice, which by straining his eyes a little he managed to read; also, that the number of grottoes was as the old man had said. However, he would not give him the stone; and the old man laughed, and asked, "Pray, what right have you to keep other people's things?" He then bowed and went away, Hsing escorting him as far as the door; but when he returned to the room, the stone had disappeared. In a great fright, he ran after the old man, who had walked slowly and was not far off, and seizing his sleeve entreated him to give back the stone. "Do you think," said the latter, "that I could conceal a stone a foot in diameter in my sleeve?" But Hsing knew that he must be superhuman, and led him back to the house, where he threw himself on his knees and begged that he might have the stone. "Is it yours or mine?" asked the old man. "Of course it is yours," replied Hsing, "though I hope you will consent to deny yourself the pleasure of keeping it." "In that case," said the old man, "it is back again;" and going into the inner room, they found the stone in its old place. "The jewels of this world," observed Hsing's visitor, "should be given

to those who know how to take care of them. This stone can choose its own master, and I am very pleased that it should remain with you; at the same time I must inform you that it was in too great a hurry to come into the world of mortals, and has not yet been freed from all contingent calamities. I had better take it away with me, and three years hence you shall have it again. If, however, you insist on keeping it, then your span of life will be shortened by three years, that your terms of existence may harmonize together. Are you willing?" Hsing said he was; whereupon the old man with his fingers closed up three of the stone's grottoes, which yielded to his touch like mud. When this was done, he turned to Hsing and told him that the grottoes on that stone represented the years of his life; and then he took his leave, firmly refusing to remain any longer, and not disclosing his name.

More than a year after this, Hsing had occasion to go away on business, and in the night a thief broke in and carried off the stone, taking nothing else at all. When Hsing came home, he was dreadfully grieved, as if his whole object in life was gone; and made all possible inquiries and efforts to get it back, but without the slightest result. Some time passed away, when one day going into a temple Hsing noticed a man selling stones, and amongst the rest he saw his old friend. Of course he immediately wanted to regain possession of it; but as the stone-seller would not consent, he shouldered the stone and went off to the nearest mandarin. The stone-seller was then asked what proof he could give that the stone was his; and he replied that the number of grottoes was eighty-nine. Hsing inquired if that was all he had to say, and when the other acknowledged that it was, he himself told the magistrate what were the characters inscribed within, also calling attention to the finger marks at the closed-up grottoes. He therefore gained his case, and the mandarin would have bamboozled the stone-seller, had he not declared that he bought it in the market for twenty ounces of silver,--whereupon he was dismissed.

A high official next offered Hsing one hundred ounces of silver for it; but he refused to sell it even for ten thousand, which so enraged the would-be purchaser that he worked up a case against Hsing,[243] and got him put in prison. Hsing was thereby compelled to pawn a great deal of his property; and then the official sent some one to try if the affair could not be managed through his son, to which Hsing, on hearing of the attempt, steadily refused to consent, saying that he and the stone could not be parted even in death. His wife, however, and his son, laid their heads together, and sent the stone to the high official, and Hsing only heard of it when he arrived home from the prison. He cursed his wife and beat his son, and frequently tried to make away with himself, though luckily his servants always managed to prevent him from succeeding.[244] At night he dreamt that a noble-looking personage appeared to him, and said, "My name is Shih Ch'ing-hsü--(Stone from Heaven). Do not grieve. I purposely quitted

you for a year and more; but next year on the 20th of the eighth moon, at dawn, come to the Hai-tai Gate and buy me back for two strings of cash." Hsing was overjoyed at this dream, and carefully took down the day mentioned. Meanwhile the stone was at the official's private house; but as the cloud manifestations ceased, the stone was less and less prized; and the following year when the official was disgraced for maladministration and subsequently died, Hsing met some of his servants at the Hai-tai Gate going off to sell the stone, and purchased it back from them for two strings of cash.

Hsing lived till he was eighty-nine; and then having prepared the necessities for his interment, bade his son bury the stone with him,[245] which was accordingly done. Six months later robbers broke into the vault[246] and made off with the stone, and his son tried in vain to secure their capture; however, a few days afterwards, he was travelling with his servants, when suddenly two men rushed forth dripping with perspiration, and looking up into the air, acknowledged their crime, saying, "Mr. Hsing, please don't torment us thus! We took the stone, and sold it for only four ounces of silver." Hsing's son and his servants then seized these men, and took them before the magistrate, where they at once acknowledged their guilt. Asking what had become of the stone, they said they had sold it to a member of the magistrate's family; and when it was produced, that official took such a fancy to it that he gave it to one of his servants and bade him place it in the treasury. Thereupon the stone slipped out of the servant's hand and broke into a hundred pieces, to the great astonishment of all present. The magistrate now had the thieves bamboed and sent them away; but Hsing's son picked up the broken pieces of the stone, and buried them in his father's grave.

FOOTNOTES:

[242] In which Peking is situated.

[243] A common form of revenge in China, and one which is easily carried through when the prosecutor is a man of wealth and influence.

[244] Another favourite method of revenging oneself upon an enemy, who is in many cases held responsible for the death thus occasioned. Mr. Alabaster told me an amusing story of a Chinese woman who deliberately walked into a pond until the water reached her knees, and remained there alternately putting her lips below the surface and threatening in a loud voice to drown herself on the spot, as life had been made unbearable by the presence of foreign barbarians. This was during the Taiping rebellion.

[245] Valuables of some kind or other are often placed in the coffins of wealthy Chinese; and women are almost always provided with a

certain quantity of jewels with which to adorn themselves in the realms below.

[246] One of the most heinous offences in the Chinese Penal Code.

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THE CHEST OF SILVER

Like all the tribe of which I held him head, Raffles professed the liveliest disdain for unwieldy plunder of any description; it might be old Sheffield, or it might be solid silver or gold, but if the thing was not to be concealed about the person, he would none whatever of it. Unlike the rest of us, however, in this as in all else, Raffles would not infrequently allow the acquisitive spirit of the mere collector to silence the dictates of professional prudence. The old oak chests, and even the mahogany wine-cooler, for which he had doubtless paid like an honest citizen, were thus immovable with pieces of crested plate, which he had neither the temerity to use nor the hardihood to melt or sell. He could but gloat over them behind locked doors, as I used to tell him, and at last one afternoon I caught him at it. It was in the year after that of my novitiate, a halcyon period at the Albany, when Raffles left no crib uncracked, and I played second-murderer every time. I had called in response to a telegram in which he stated that he was going out of town, and must say good-by to me before he went. And I could only think that he was inspired by the same impulse toward the bronzed salvers and the tarnished teapots with which I found him surrounded, until my eyes lit upon the enormous silver-chest into which he was fitting them one by one.

"Allow me, Bunny! I shall take the liberty of locking both doors behind you and putting the key in my pocket," said Raffles, when he had let me in. "Not that I mean to take you prisoner, my dear fellow; but there are those of us who can turn keys from the outside, though it was never an accomplishment of mine."

"Not Crawshay again?" I cried, standing still in my hat.

Raffles regarded me with that tantalizing smile of his which might mean nothing, yet which often meant so much; and in a flash I was convinced that our most jealous enemy and dangerous rival, the doyen of an older school, had paid him yet another visit.

"That remains to be seen," was the measured reply; "and I for one have not set naked eye on the fellow since I saw him off through that window

and left myself for dead on this very spot. In fact, I imagined him comfortably back in jail."

"Not old Crawshay!" said I. "He's far too good a man to be taken twice. I should call him the very prince of professional cracksmen."

"Should you?" said Raffles coldly, with as cold an eye looking into mine. "Then you had better prepare to repel princes when I'm gone."

"But gone where?" I asked, finding a corner for my hat and coat, and helping myself to the comforts of the venerable dresser which was one of our friend's greatest treasures. "Where is it you are off to, and why are you taking this herd of white elephants with you?"

Raffles bestowed the cachet of his smile on my description of his motley plate. He joined me in one of his favorite cigarettes, only shaking a superior head at his own decanter.

"One question at a time, Bunny," said he. "In the first place, I am going to have these rooms freshened up with a potful of paint, the electric light, and the telephone you've been at me about so long."

"Good!" I cried. "Then we shall be able to talk to each other day and night!"

"And get overheard and run in for our pains? I shall wait till you are run in, I think," said Raffles cruelly. "But the rest's a necessity: not that I love new paint or am pining for electric light, but for reasons which I will just breathe in your private ear, Bunny. You must not try to take them too seriously; but the fact is, there is just the least bit of a twitter against me in this rookery of an Albany. It must have been started by that tame old bird, Policeman Mackenzie; it isn't very bad as yet, but it needn't be that to reach my ears. Well, it was open to me either to clear out altogether, and so confirm whatever happened to be in the air, or to go off for a time, under some arrangement which would give the authorities ample excuse for overhauling every inch of my rooms. Which would you have done, Bunny?"

"Cleared out, while I could!" said I devoutly.

"So I should have thought," rejoined Raffles. "Yet you see the merit of my plan. I shall leave every mortal thing unlocked."

"Except that," said I, kicking the huge oak case with the iron bands and clamps, and the baize lining fast disappearing under heavy packages bearing the shapes of urns and candelabra.

"That," replied Raffles, "is neither to go with me nor to remain here."

"Then what do you propose to do with it?"

"You have your banking account, and your banker," he went on. This was perfectly true, though it was Raffles alone who had kept the one open, and enabled me to propitiate the other in moments of emergency.

"Well?"

"Well, pay in this bundle of notes this afternoon, and say you have had a great week at Liverpool and Lincoln; then ask them if they can do with your silver while you run over to Paris for a merry Easter. I should tell them it's rather heavy--a lot of old family stuff that you've a good mind to leave with them till you marry and settle down."

I winced at this, but consented to the rest after a moment's consideration. After all, and for more reasons that I need enumerate, it was a plausible tale enough. And Raffles had no banker; it was quite impossible for him to explain, across any single counter, the large sums of hard cash which did sometimes fall into his hands; and it might well be that he had nursed my small account in view of the very quandary which had now arisen. On all grounds, it was impossible for me to refuse him, and I am still glad to remember that my assent was given, on the whole, ungrudgingly.

"But when will the chest be ready for me," I merely asked, as I stuffed the notes into my cigarette case. "And how are we to get it out of this, in banking hours, without attracting any amount of attention at this end?"

Raffles gave me an approving nod.

"I'm glad to see you spot the crux so quickly, Bunny. I have thought of your taking it round to your place first, under cloud of night; but we are bound to be seen even so, and on the whole it would look far less suspicious in broad daylight. It will take you some twelve or fifteen minutes to drive to your bank in a growler, so if you are here with one at a quarter to ten to-morrow morning, that will exactly meet the case. But you must have a hansom this minute if you mean to prepare the way with those notes this afternoon!"

It was only too like the Raffles of those days to dismiss a subject and myself in the same breath, with a sudden nod, and a brief grasp of the hand he was already holding out for mine. I had a great mind to take another of his cigarettes instead, for there were one or two points on which he had carefully omitted to enlighten me. Thus, I had still to learn the bare direction of his journey; and it was all that I could do to drag it from him as I stood buttoning my coat and gloves.

"Scotland," he vouchsafed at last.

"At Easter," I remarked.

"To learn the language," he explained. "I have no tongue but my own, you see, but I try to make up for it by cultivating every shade of that. Some of them have come in useful even to your knowledge, Bunny: what price my Cockney that night in St. John's Wood? I can keep up my end in stage Irish, real Devonshire, very fair Norfolk, and three distinct Yorkshire dialects. But my good Galloway Scots might be better, and I mean to make it so."

"You still haven't told me where to write to you."

"I'll write to you first, Bunny."

"At least let me see you off," I urged at the door. "I promise not to look at your ticket if you tell me the train!"

"The eleven-fifty from Euston."

"Then I'll be with you by quarter to ten."

And I left him without further parley, reading his impatience in his face. Everything, to be sure, seemed clear enough without that fuller discussion which I loved and Raffles hated. Yet I thought we might at least have dined together, and in my heart I felt just the least bit hurt, until it occurred to me as I drove to count the notes in my cigarette case. Resentment was impossible after that. The sum ran well into three figures, and it was plain that Raffles meant me to have a good time in his absence. So I told his lie with unction at my bank, and made due arrangements for the reception of his chest next morning. Then I repaired to our club, hoping he would drop in, and that we might dine together after all. In that I was disappointed. It was nothing, however, to the disappointment awaiting me at the Albany, when I arrived in my four-wheeler at the appointed hour next morning.

"Mr. Raffles 'as gawn, sir," said the porter, with a note of reproach in his confidential undertone. The man was a favorite with Raffles, who used him and tipped him with consummate tact, and he knew me only less well.

"Gone!" I echoed aghast. "Where on earth to?"

"Scotland, sir."

"Already?"

"By the eleven-fifty lawst night."

"Last night! I thought he meant eleven-fifty this morning!"

"He knew you did, sir, when you never came, and he told me to tell you there was no such train."

I could have rent my garments in mortification and annoyance with myself and Raffles. It was as much his fault as mine. But for his indecent haste in getting rid of me, his characteristic abruptness at the end, there would have been no misunderstanding or mistake.

"Any other message?" I inquired morosely.

"Only about the box, sir. Mr. Raffles said as you was goin' to take chawge of it time he's away, and I've a friend ready to lend a 'and in getting it on the cab. It's a rare 'eavy 'un, but Mr. Raffles an' me could lift it all right between us, so I dessay me an' my friend can."

For my own part, I must confess that its weight concerned me less than the vast size of that infernal chest, as I drove with it past club and park at ten o'clock in the morning. Sit as far back as I might in the four-wheeler, I could conceal neither myself nor my connection with the huge iron-clamped case upon the roof: in my heated imagination its wood was glass through which all the world could see the guilty contents. Once an officious constable held up the traffic at our approach, and for a moment I put a blood-curdling construction upon the simple ceremony. Low boys shouted after us--or if it was not after us, I thought it was--and that their cry was "Stop thief!" Enough said of one of the most unpleasant cab-drives I ever had in my life. Horresco referens.

At the bank, however, thanks to the foresight and liberality of Raffles, all was smooth water. I paid my cabman handsomely, gave a florin to the stout fellow in livery whom he helped with the chest, and could have pressed gold upon the genial clerk who laughed like a gentleman at my jokes about the Liverpool winners and the latest betting on the Family Plate. I was only disconcerted when he informed me that the bank gave no receipts for deposits of this nature. I am now aware that few London banks do. But it is pleasing to believe that at the time I looked--what I felt--as though all I valued upon earth were in jeopardy.

I should have got through the rest of that day happily enough, such was the load off my mind and hands, but for an extraordinary and most disconcerting note received late at night from Raffles himself. He was a man who telegraphed freely, but seldom wrote a letter. Sometimes, however, he sent a scribbled line by special messenger; and overnight, evidently in the train, he had scribbled this one to post in the small hours at Crewe:

"Ware Prince of Professors! He was in the offing when I left.
If slightest cause for uneasiness about bank, withdraw at once
and keep in own rooms Like good chap,

"A. J. R.

"P. S.--Other reasons, as you shall hear."

There was a nice nightcap for a puzzled head! I had made rather an evening of it, what with increase of funds and decrease of anxiety, but this cryptic admonition spoiled the remainder of my night. It had arrived by a late post, and I only wished that I had left it all night in my letter-box. What exactly did it mean? And what exactly must I do? These were questions that confronted me with fresh force in the morning.

The news of Crawshay did not surprise me. I was quite sure that Raffles had been given good reason to bear him in mind before his journey, even if he had not again beheld the ruffian in the flesh. That ruffian and that journey might be more intimately connected than I had yet supposed. Raffles never told me all. Yet the solid fact held good--held better than ever--that I had seen his plunder safely planted in my bank. Crawshay himself could not follow it there. I was certain he had not followed my cab: in the acute self-consciousness induced by that abominable drive, I should have known it in my bones if he had. I thought of the porter's friend who had helped me with the chest. No, I remember him as well as I remembered Crawshay; they were quite different types.

To remove that vile box from the bank, on top of another cab, with no stronger pretext and no further instructions, was not to be thought of for a moment. Yet I did think of it, for hours. I was always anxious to do my part by Raffles; he had done more than his by me, not once or twice, to-day or yesterday, but again and again from the very first. I need not state the obvious reasons I had for fighting shy of the personal custody of his accursed chest. Yet he had run worse risks for me, and I wanted him to learn that he, too, could depend on a devotion not unworthy of his own.

In my dilemma I did what I have often done when at a loss for light and leading. I took hardly any lunch, but went to Northumberland Avenue and had a Turkish bath instead. I know nothing so cleansing to mind as well as body, nothing better calculated to put the finest possible edge on such judgment as one may happen to possess. Even Raffles, without an ounce to lose or a nerve to soothe, used to own a sensuous appreciation of the peace of mind and person to be gained in this fashion when all others failed. For me, the fun began before the boots were off one's feet; the muffled footfalls, the thin sound of the

fountain, even the spent swathed forms upon the couches, and the whole clean, warm, idle atmosphere, were so much unction to my simpler soul. The half-hour in the hot-rooms I used to count but a strenuous step to a divine lassitude of limb and accompanying exaltation of intellect. And yet--and yet--it was in the hottest room of all, in a temperature of 270 deg. Fahrenheit, that the bolt fell from the Pall Mall Gazette which I had bought outside the bath.

I was turning over the hot, crisp pages, and positively revelling in my fiery furnace, when the following headlines and leaded paragraphs leapt to my eye with the force of a veritable blow:

BANK ROBBERS IN THE WEST END-- DARING AND MYSTERIOUS CRIME

An audacious burglary and dastardly assault have been committed on the premises of the City and Suburban Bank in Sloane Street, W. From the details so far to hand, the robbery appears to have been deliberately planned and adroitly executed in the early hours of this morning.

A night watchman named Fawcett states that between one and two o'clock he heard a slight noise in the neighborhood of the lower strong-room, used as a repository for the plate and other possessions of various customers of the bank. Going down to investigate, he was instantly attacked by a powerful ruffian, who succeeded in felling him to the ground before an alarm could be raised.

Fawcett is unable to furnish any description of his assailant or assailants, but is of opinion that more than one were engaged in the commission of the crime. When the unfortunate man recovered consciousness, no trace of the thieves remained, with the exception of a single candle which had been left burning on the flags of the corridor. The strong-room, however, had been opened, and it is feared the raid on the chests of plate and other valuables may prove to have been only too successful, in view of the Easter exodus, which the thieves had evidently taken into account. The ordinary banking chambers were not even visited; entry and exit are believed to have been effected through the coal cellar, which is also situated in the basement. Up to the present the police have effected no arrest.

I sat practically paralyzed by this appalling news; and I swear that, even in that incredible temperature, it was a cold perspiration in which I sweltered from head to heel. Crawshay, of course! Crawshay once more upon the track of Raffles and his ill-gotten gains! And once more I blamed Raffles himself: his warning had come too late: he should have wired to me at once not to take the box to the bank at all. He

was a madman ever to have invested in so obvious and obtrusive a receptacle for treasure. It would serve Raffles right if that and no other was the box which had been broken into by the thieves.

Yet, when I considered the character of his treasure, I fairly shuddered in my sweat. It was a hoard of criminal relics. Suppose his chest had indeed been rifled, and emptied of every silver thing but one; that one remaining piece of silver, seen of men, was quite enough to cast Raffles into the outer darkness of penal servitude! And Crawshaw was capable of it--of perceiving the insidious revenge--of taking it without compunction or remorse.

There was only one course for me. I must follow my instructions to the letter and recover the chest at all hazards, or be taken myself in the attempt. If only Raffles had left me some address, to which I could have wired some word of warning! But it was no use thinking of that; for the rest there was time enough up to four o'clock, and as yet it was not three. I determined to go through with my bath and make the most of it. Might it not be my last for years?

But I was past enjoying even a Turkish bath. I had not the patience for a proper shampoo, or sufficient spirit for the plunge. I weighed myself automatically, for that was a matter near my heart; but I forgot to give my man his sixpence until the reproachful intonation of his adieu recalled me to myself. And my couch in the cooling gallery--my favorite couch, in my favorite corner, which I had secured with gusto on coming in--it was a bed of thorns, with hideous visions of a plank-bed to follow!

I ought to be able to add that I heard the burglary discussed on adjacent couches before I left I certainly listened for it, and was rather disappointed more than once when I had held my breath in vain. But this is the unvarnished record of an odious hour, and it passed without further aggravation from without; only, as I drove to Sloane Street, the news was on all the posters, and on one I read of "a clew" which spelt for me a doom I was grimly resolved to share.

Already there was something in the nature of a "run" up on the Sloane Street branch of the City and Suburban. A cab drove away with a chest of reasonable dimensions as mine drove up, while in the bank itself a lady was making a painful scene. As for the genial clerk who had roared at my jokes the day before, he was mercifully in no mood for any more, but, on the contrary, quite rude to me at sight.

"I've been expecting you all the afternoon," said he. "You needn't look so pale."

"Is it safe?"

"That Noah's Ark of yours? Yes, so I hear; they'd just got to it when they were interrupted, and they never went back again."

"Then it wasn't even opened?"

"Only just begun on, I believe."

"Thank God!"

"You may; we don't," growled the clerk. "The manager says he believes your chest was at the bottom of it all."

"How could it be?" I asked uneasily.

"By being seen on the cab a mile off, and followed," said the clerk.

"Does the manager want to see me?" I asked boldly.

"Not unless you want to see him," was the blunt reply. "He's been at it with others all the afternoon, and they haven't all got off as cheap as you."

"Then my silver shall not embarrass you any longer," said I grandly. "I meant to leave it if it was all right, but after all you have said I certainly shall not. Let your man or men bring up the chest at once. I dare say they also have been 'at it with others all the afternoon,' but I shall make this worth their while."

I did not mind driving through the streets with the thing this time. My present relief was too overwhelming as yet to admit of pangs and fears for the immediate future. No summer sun had ever shone more brightly than that rather watery one of early April. There was a green-and-gold dust of buds and shoots on the trees as we passed the park. I felt greater things sprouting in my heart. Hansoms passed with schoolboys just home for the Easter holidays, four-wheelers outward bound, with bicycles and perambulators atop; none that rode in them were half so happy as I, with the great load on my cab, but the greater one off my heart.

At Mount Street it just went into the lift; that was a stroke of luck; and the lift-man and I between us carried it into my flat. It seemed a featherweight to me now. I felt a Samson in the exaltation of that hour. And I will not say what my first act was when I found myself alone with my white elephant in the middle of the room; enough that the siphon was still doing its work when the glass slipped through my fingers to the floor.

"Bunny!"

It was Raffles. Yet for a moment I looked about me quite in vain. He was not at the window; he was not at the open door. And yet Raffles it had been, or at all events his voice, and that bubbling over with fun and satisfaction, be his body where it might. In the end I dropped my eyes, and there was his living face in the middle of the lid of the chest, like that of the saint upon its charger.

But Raffles was alive, Raffles was laughing as though his vocal cords would snap--there was neither tragedy nor illusion in the apparition of Raffles. A life-size Jack-in-the-box, he had thrust his head through a lid within the lid, cut by himself between the two iron bands that ran round the chest like the straps of a portmanteau. He must have been busy at it when I found him pretending to pack, if not far into that night, for it was a very perfect piece of work; and even as I stared without a word, and he crouched laughing in my face, an arm came squeezing out, keys in hand; one was turned in either of the two great padlocks, the whole lid lifted, and out stepped Raffles like the conjurer he was.

"So you were the burglar!" I exclaimed at last. "Well, I am just as glad I didn't know."

He had wrung my hand already, but at this he fairly mangled it in his.

"You dear little brick," he cried, "that's the one thing of all things I longed to hear you say! How could you have behaved as you've done if you had known? How could any living man? How could you have acted, as the polar star of all the stages could not have acted in your place? Remember that I have heard a lot, and as good as seen as much as I've heard. Bunny, I don't know where you were greatest: at the Albany, here, or at your bank!"

"I don't know where I was most miserable," I rejoined, beginning to see the matter in a less perfervid light. "I know you don't credit me with much finesse, but I would undertake to be in the secret and to do quite as well; the only difference would be in my own peace of mind, which, of course, doesn't count."

But Raffles wagged away with his most charming and disarming smile; he was in old clothes, rather tattered and torn, and more than a little grimy as to the face and hands, but, on the surface, wonderfully little the worse for his experience. And, as I say, his smile was the smile of the Raffles I loved best.

"You would have done your damndest, Bunny! There is no limit to your heroism; but you forget the human equation in the pluckiest of the plucky. I couldn't afford to forget it, Bunny; I couldn't afford to give a point away. Don't talk as though I hadn't trusted you! I trusted my very life to your loyal tenacity. What do you suppose would

have happened to me if you had let me rip in that strong-room? Do you think I would ever have crept out and given myself up? Yes, I'll have a peg for once; the beauty of all laws is in the breaking, even of the kind we make unto ourselves."

I had a Sullivan for him, too; and in another minute he was spread out on my sofa, stretching his cramped limbs with infinite gusto, a cigarette between his fingers, a yellow bumper at hand on the chest of his triumph and my tribulation.

"Never mind when it occurred to me, Bunny; as a matter of fact, it was only the other day, when I had decided to go away for the real reasons I have already given you. I may have made more of them to you than I do in my own mind, but at all events they exist. And I really did want the telephone and the electric light."

"But where did you stow the silver before you went?"

"Nowhere; it was my luggage--a portmanteau, cricket-bag, and suit-case full of very little else--and by the same token I left the lot at Euston, and one of us must fetch them this evening."

"I can do that," said I. "But did you really go all the way to Crewe?"

"Didn't you get my note? I went all the way to Crewe to post you those few lines, my dear Bunny! It's no use taking trouble if you don't take trouble enough; I wanted you to show the proper set of faces at the bank and elsewhere, and I know you did. Besides, there was an up-train four minutes after mine got in. I simply posted my letter in Crewe station, and changed from one train to the other."

"At two in the morning!"

"Nearer three, Bunny. It was after seven when I slung in with the Daily Mail. The milk had beaten me by a short can. But even so I had two very good hours before you were due."

"And to think," I murmured, "how you deceived me there!"

"With your own assistance," said Raffles laughing. "If you had looked it up you would have seen there was no such train in the morning, and I never said there was. But I meant you to be deceived, Bunny, and I won't say I didn't--it was all for the sake of the side! Well, when you carted me away with such laudable despatch, I had rather an uncomfortable half-hour, but that was all just then. I had my candle, I had matches, and lots to read. It was quite nice in that strong-room until a very unpleasant incident occurred."

"Do tell me, my dear fellow!"

"I must have another Sullivan--thank you--and a match. The unpleasant incident was steps outside and a key in the lock! I was disporting myself on the lid of the trunk at the time. I had barely time to knock out my light and slip down behind it. Luckily it was only another box of sorts; a jewel-case, to be more precise; you shall see the contents in a moment. The Easter exodus has done me even better than I dared to hope."

His words reminded me of the Pall Mall Gazette, which I had brought in my pocket from the Turkish bath. I fished it out, all wrinkled and bloated by the heat of the hottest room, and handed it to Raffles with my thumb upon the leaded paragraphs.

"Delightful!" said he when he had read them. "More thieves than one, and the coal-cellar of all places as a way in! I certainly tried to give it that appearance. I left enough candle-grease there to make those coals burn bravely. But it looked up into a blind backyard, Bunny, and a boy of eight couldn't have squeezed through the trap. Long may that theory keep them happy at Scotland Yard!"

"But what about the fellow you knocked out?" I asked. "That was not like you, Raffles."

Raffles blew pensive rings as he lay back on my sofa, his black hair tumbled on the cushion, his pale profile as clear and sharp against the light as though slashed out with the scissors.

"I know it wasn't, Bunny," he said regretfully. "But things like that, as the poet will tell you, are really inseparable from victories like mine. It had taken me a couple of hours to break out of that strong-room; I was devoting a third to the harmless task of simulating the appearance of having broken in; and it was then I heard the fellow's stealthy step. Some might have stood their ground and killed him; more would have bolted into a worse corner than they were in already. I left my candle where it was, crept to meet the poor devil, flattened myself against the wall, and let him have it as he passed. I acknowledge the foul blow, but here's evidence that it was mercifully struck. The victim has already told his tale."

As he drained his glass, but shook his head when I wished to replenish it, Raffles showed me the flask which he had carried in his pocket: it was still nearly full; and I found that he had otherwise provisioned himself over the holidays. On either Easter Day or Bank Holiday, had I failed him, it had been his intention to make the best escape he could. But the risk must have been enormous, and it filled my glowing skin to think that he had not relied on me in vain.

As for his gleanings from such jewel-cases as were spending the Easter

recess in the strong-room of my bank, (without going into rhapsodies or even particulars on the point,) I may mention that they realized enough for me to join Raffles on his deferred holiday in Scotland, besides enabling him to play more regularly for Middlesex in the ensuing summer than had been the case for several seasons. In fine, this particular exploit entirely justified itself in my eyes, in spite of the superfluous (but invariable) secretiveness which I could seldom help resenting in my heart I never thought less of it than in the present instance; and my one mild reproach was on the subject of the phantom Crawshay.

"You let me think he was in the air again," I said. "But it wouldn't surprise me to find that you had never heard of him since the day of his escape through your window."

"I never even thought of him, Bunny, until you came to see me the day before yesterday, and put him into my head with your first words. The whole point was to make you as genuinely anxious about the plate as you must have seemed all along the line."

"Of course I see your point," I rejoined; "but mine is that you labored it. You needn't have written me a downright lie about the fellow."

"Nor did I, Bunny."

"Not about the 'prince of professors' being 'in the offing' when you left?"

"My dear Bunny, but so he was!" cried Raffles. "Time was when I was none too pure an amateur. But after this I take leave to consider myself a professor of the professors. And I should like to see one more capable of skipping their side!"

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *A Thief in the Night*, by E. W. Hornung

STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A MILLION DOLLARS

by Ingersoll Lockwood.

Old New Yorkers may remember Dingee's famous Club House in lower Greene Street. From 1800 to 1850 it was the most fashionable gambling house in the metropolis, its founder, Alphonse Dingee, having been the first to introduce _roulette_ and _rouge et noir_ into the new world. It was in 1850 or a little later that ill health obliged his son Cyrill to sell the business out. He retired to his country seat at Bricksburg, quite a palatial residence for those days, where he died shortly after, leaving

a round million dollars and one child, a daughter, Daisy. Spite of the fact that she was popularly known throughout the country as the "gambler's daughter," there were several respectable young men in the place who would have been only too happy to administer an estate worth a round million with Daisy thrown in for better or worse.

But Daisy Dingee knew what she wanted, and it was nothing more nor less than an alliance with the most aristocratic family in the country, to wit: the Delurys, whose large white mansion at the other end of the town was as tumble-down and shabby looking as Daisy's was neat, fresh, and well kept. Miss Dingee, therefore, proceeded to throw herself at the head of one Monmouth Delury, mentally and physically a colorless sort of an individual, who, for want of sufficient intellect to make an honest living, passed his time going to seed with the thousand or so acres of land belonging to him and his maiden sisters, Hetty, Prudence, and Martha, three women who walked as stiff as they talked, although they never were known to discuss any subject other than the Delury family.

When Daisy's proposition was made known to them they tried to faint, but were too stiff to fall over, and were obliged to content themselves with gasping out:

"What! Daisy Dingee marry our brother, the head of the Delury family!"

But it was the first idea that had ever entered the brother's head, and he clung to it with a parent's affection for his first born. In a few months Mr. and Mrs. Monmouth Delury set out for Paris with that proverbial speed with which Americans betake themselves to the French capital when occasion offers. They found it a much pleasanter place than Bricksburg. Delury improved rapidly and Daisy fell quite in love with him, made her will in his favor, contracted the typhoid fever and died.

Whereupon the really disconsolate widower sent for his three sisters to join him. They had but one objection to going, that was to part company with the dear old homestead, but they overcame it the day after receiving Monmouth's letter, which happened to be a Friday, and took the Saturday's steamer.

To confess the truth, the Delurys had been so land-poor that their spare aristocratic figures were rather the result of necessity than inclination. Six months of Paris life under the benign protection of Dingee's round million made different women of them. It was wonderful what a metamorphosis Parisian dressmakers and restaurateurs effected in their figures. They became round and plump. They stopped talking about Bricksburg, signed themselves the Misses Delury of New York, enrolled themselves as patrons of art, gave elegant dinners, and in a very short time set up pretensions to being the leaders of the American colony.

But remorseless fate was at their heels. _Figaro_ unearthed the secret

of old Dingee's million, and the Delurys suddenly found themselves the sensation of Paris, the butt of ridicule in the comic papers. Monmouth had been in poor health for several months, and this killed him.

Dingee's million was now in the eye of the law divided up among his three sisters, but fate willed it otherwise, for the following year Hetty, the eldest, died of Roman fever, and six months later Prudence fell a victim to rat poison in a small hotel at Grasse, City of Delightful Odors, in the south of France, whither she had gone in search of balmy air for her sister Martha, who had suddenly developed symptoms of consumption.

Left thus alone in the world with old Dingee's million and an incurable ailment, Martha's only ambition was to reach Bricksburg and die in the old white Delury mansion. It seemed to her that its great spacious rooms would enable her to breathe more easily and to fight death off for possibly another year.

But it was not to be. She got as far as Paris when old Dingee's million again changed hands, going this time by will to Martha's only relatives, twin brothers, John and William Winkletip, produce dealers in Washington street, New York.

The will was a peculiar one, as was to be expected:

I give, devise, and bequeath all the property popularly known as the "Dingee Million" to my cousins John and William Winkletip, produce dealers of New York, as joint tenants for their lives and the life of each of them, with remainder over to the eldest son of the survivor, his heirs and assigns forever; provided, that said remainder man shall be of full age at the time of his father's decease, and shall thereupon enter the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church and devote his life and the income of this estate to the encouragement of legislative enactment throughout the United States for the suppression of gambling and wager laying.

In default of such male heir, the Dingee million was to be divided up among certain religious and eleemosynary institutions.

When the cablegram from Paris informing them of their extraordinary luck reached the Winkletip Brothers, they were down in the cellar of the old tenement which served as their place of business, with their long jean coats on, busily engaged in sorting onions. As the Winkletips were only a little past fifty, and as strong as hickory knobs, their families were quite satisfied to get only a life estate in the Dingee million, for, barring accidents, the brothers had twenty-five or thirty years to live yet.

True, Brother John had a son, Cyrus, who would soon be of age, but he

was a worthless wight, whose normal condition was alcoholic stupor, barely characterized with sufficient lucidity to enable him to distinguish rotten vegetables from sound.

"He will die years before his father," every one remarked, "and then the gambler's money will go where it ought to go."

There had been a fire next door to the Winkletips about the time the good news had arrived from Paris; a huge warehouse had burned down, leaving a brick wall towering sixty feet above the old wooden tenement in which the brothers did business. They had given notice to the authorities; but the inspectors had pronounced the wall perfectly safe. So the two brothers continued to come and go, in their best Sunday clothes, however, for they were only engaged in settling up the old business.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the huge wall fell with a terrific crash upon the wooden tenement, crushing it like an egg-shell. When the two brothers were taken out from the ruins, John was pronounced dead and a coroner's permit was given to remove him to a neighboring undertaker's establishment. William lived six hours, conscious to the last and grateful to an all-wise Providence that his worthless nephew would now be excluded from any control over the Dingee million.

John Winkletip was a grass widower, his wife, an Englishwoman, having abandoned him and returned to England, and for many years he had made his home with his only other child, a widowed daughter, Mrs. Timmins, who was openly opposed to many of her father's peculiar notions, as she termed them, one of which was his strong advocacy of cremation; he being one of the original stockholders and at the time of his death a director of the Long Island Cremation Society.

Consequently Mrs. Timmins gave orders that immediately after the coroner's inquest, her father's body should be removed to her residence in Harlem, but as the officers of the Cremation Society held the solemnly executed direction and authorization of their late friend and associate to incinerate his remains, they were advised by the counsel of their corporation that such an instrument would justify them in taking possession of the remains at the very earliest moment possible and removing it to the crematory.

Warned by the undertakers of Mrs. Timmins' threatened interference, they resolved not to risk even the delay necessary to procure a burial casket; in fact it would be a useless expense, anyway, and consequently John Winkletip began his last ride on earth lying in the cool depths of the undertaker's ice box.

As Mrs. Timmins's cab turned into Washington Street she met a hearse, but not until she had reached the undertaker's establishment was her

suspicion transformed into certainty by being told that her father's body was already on its way to the crematory.

Mrs. Timmins was a long-headed woman. She knew the uncertainties of cab transportation through the crowded streets below Canal, and dismissing her cab at the Chambers Street station of the Third Avenue Elevated, she was soon speeding on her way to the Long Island City ferry.

This she reached just as a boat was leaving the slip. Misfortune number one. When she finally reached the Long Island side, she threw herself into the carriage nearest at hand, crying out:

"To the crematory! Five dollars extra if you get me there in time!"

It was not many minutes before Mrs. Timmins became aware of the fact that the horse was next to worthless, and could scarcely be lashed into a respectable trot. Mrs. Timmins was nearly frantic. Every minute her head was thrust out of the window to urge the hackman to greater speed. There was but one consoling thought--the hearse itself might get blocked or might have missed a boat!

As again and again her head was thrust out of the carriage window her hair became disheveled, for she had removed her hat, and the superstitious Hibernian on the box was upon the point of abandoning his post at sight of the wild and crazed look presented by Mrs. Timmins. Was she not some one's ghost, making this wild and mysterious ride?

But the promise of an extra five dollars kept the man at his post.

Suddenly a cry of joy escaped Mrs. Timmins's lips. The hearse was just ahead of them; but its driver had the better horses, and half suspecting that something was wrong, he whipped up vigorously and disappeared in a cloud of dust. Mrs. Timmins's horse was now as wet as if he had been dipped into the river, and she expected every minute to see him give out; but, strange to say, he had warmed up to his work, and now, in response to the driver's urging, broke into a run.

Again Mrs. Timmins caught a glimpse of the black coach of death in the dust clouds ahead of her. The race became every instant more exciting. It was a strange sight, and instinctively the farmers, in their returning vegetable wagons, drew aside to let them pass. Once more the hearse disappeared in the dust clouds. This was the last Mrs. Timmins saw of it until she drew up in front of the crematorium. There it stood, with its black doors thrown wide open. She had come too late! Her father's body had already been thrust into the fiery furnace.

The antagonism of Winkletip's family to his views concerning the cremation of the dead was an open secret with every attaché of the society, and the men in charge were determined that the society should

come out the winner. They were on the lookout for the body. Everything, to the minutest detail, was in readiness. The furnace had been pushed to its greatest destroying power, and hence was it that haste overcame dignity when the foam-flecked and panting horses of the undertaker drew up in front of the entrance of the crematory.

The ice-chest was snatched from the hearse, borne hurriedly into the furnace-room, set upon the iron platform, wheeled into the very center of the white flames, whose waving, curling, twisting tongues seemed reaching out to their fullest length, impatient for their prey, and the iron doors slammed shut with a loud, resounding clangor.

At that instant a woman, hatless and breathless, with disheveled hair, burst into the furnace-room.

"Hold! Hold!" she shrieked, and then her hands flew to her face, and staggering backward and striking heavily against the wall, she sank, limp and lifeless, in a heap on the stone floor of the furnace-room.

But the two men in charge had neither eyes nor ears for Mrs. Timmins. As the doors closed they sprang to their posts of observation, in front of the two peep-holes, and stood watching the effect of the flames upon the huge ice-chest.

Its wooden covering parted here and there with a loud crack, laying bare the metal case, from the seams of which burst fitful puffs of steam. Now came a sight so strange and curious that the two men held their breath as they gazed upon it! By the vaporizing of the water from the melted ice the flames were pushed back from the chest, and it lay there for an instant, as if protected by some miraculous aura.

Then happened something which caused the men to reel and stagger as if their limbs were paralyzed by drink, and which painted their faces with as deep a pallor as death's own hand could have laid upon them.

From the furnace depths came forth a dull, muffled cry of "Help! Help!"

Making a desperate effort, the men tore open first the outer and then the inner doors of the fire chamber. As the air rushed in, the lid of the metal chest burst silently open. Again the cry of "Help!" rang out, and two hands quivered for an instant above the edge of the chest, then with a loud and defiant roar the flames closed in upon it, and began to lick it up ravenously. The doors were banged shut, and John Winkletip had his way.

But the Dingee million seemed to draw back instinctively from the touch of the worthless Cy Winkletip.

With loud cries of joy, the various beneficiaries under Martha Delury's

will now discovered that Cyrus Winkletip was born on the 11th day of August, and that as his father had departed this life on the 10th day of August, the son was not of full age when his father died. But the law put an end to this short-lived joy by making known one of its curious bits of logic, which so often startle the layman.

It was this: The law takes no note of parts of a day, and therefore as Cyrus Winkletip was of age on the first minute of his twenty-first birthday, he was also of age on the last minute of the day before--consequently on the first minute of the day before he was twenty-one!

This gave the Dingee million to Cy Winkletip!

Under constant and stringent surveillance and tutelage, Cy Winkletip was, after several years of as close application as was deemed safe in view of his weak mental condition, admitted to the ministry in accordance with the provisions of Miss Delury's will.

At last the wicked Dingee million seemed safely launched upon its task of undoing the wrong it had done; but Cy Winkletip's mind ran completely down in five years and he died a wretched slaving, idiot.

Mrs. Timmins was inclined to warn off the Dingee million with a gesture of horror; but, yielding to the solicitation of her friends, she consented to take title in order that she might create a trust with it for some good and noble purpose. To this end, by a last will and testament she created and endowed the American Society for the Suppression of Gambling and Wager-laying, and then died.

The trustees at once began to erect the buildings called for, but before the society had had an opportunity to suppress a single gaming establishment, the lawyers, at the prayer of Mrs. John Winkletip, Mrs. Timmin's mother, fell tooth and nail upon the trust, which was declared too "vague, shadowy, and indefinite to be executed," and the Dingee million, its roundness now sadly shrunk, made its way across the ocean to Mrs. John Winkletip, of Clapham Common, London.

She died last year and with her the wanderings of the Dingee million came to an end. She willed it to trustees for building and maintaining a Hospital for Stray Dogs and Homeless Cats, and those learned in the law say that the trust will stand.

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Eleven Possible Cases*, by Various

THE ADVENTURE OF THE BERYL CORONET

“Holmes,” said I, as I stood one morning in our bow-window looking down the street, “here is a madman coming along. It seems rather sad that his relatives should allow him to come out alone.”

My friend rose lazily from his arm-chair and stood with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown, looking over my shoulder. It was a bright, crisp February morning, and the snow of the day before still lay deep upon the ground, shimmering brightly in the wintry sun. Down the centre of Baker Street it had been ploughed into a brown crumbly band by the traffic, but at either side and on the heaped-up edges of the foot-paths it still lay as white as when it fell. The gray pavement had been cleaned and scraped, but was still dangerously slippery, so that there were fewer passengers than usual. Indeed, from the direction of the Metropolitan Station no one was coming save the single gentleman whose eccentric conduct had drawn my attention.

He was a man of about fifty, tall, portly, and imposing, with a massive, strongly marked face and a commanding figure. He was dressed in a sombre yet rich style, in black frock-coat, shining hat, neat brown gaiters, and well-cut pearl-gray trousers. Yet his actions were in absurd contrast to the dignity of his dress and features, for he was running hard, with occasional little springs, such as a weary man gives who is little accustomed to set any tax upon his legs. As he ran he jerked his hands up and down, waggled his head, and writhed his face into the most extraordinary contortions.

“What on earth can be the matter with him?” I asked. “He is looking up at the numbers of the houses.”

“I believe that he is coming here,” said Holmes, rubbing his hands.

“Here?”

“Yes; I rather think he is coming to consult me professionally. I think that I recognize the symptoms. Ha! did I not tell you?” As he spoke, the man, puffing and blowing, rushed at our door and pulled at our bell until the whole house resounded with the clanging.

A few moments later he was in our room, still puffing, still gesticulating, but with so fixed a look of grief and despair in his eyes that our smiles were turned in an instant to horror and pity. For a while he could not get his words out, but swayed his body and plucked at his hair like one who has been driven to the extreme limits of his reason. Then, suddenly springing to his feet, he beat his head against the wall with such force that we both rushed upon him and tore him away to the centre of the room. Sherlock Holmes pushed him down into the

easy-chair, and, sitting beside him, patted his hand, and chatted with him in the easy, soothing tones which he knew so well how to employ.

“You have come to me to tell your story, have you not?” said he. “You are fatigued with your haste. Pray wait until you have recovered yourself, and then I shall be most happy to look into any little problem which you may submit to me.”

The man sat for a minute or more with a heaving chest, fighting against his emotion. Then he passed his handkerchief over his brow, set his lips tight, and turned his face towards us.

“No doubt you think me mad?” said he.

“I see that you have had some great trouble,” responded Holmes.

“God knows I have!—a trouble which is enough to unseat my reason, so sudden and so terrible is it. Public disgrace I might have faced, although I am a man whose character has never yet borne a stain. Private affliction also is the lot of every man; but the two coming together, and in so frightful a form, have been enough to shake my very soul. Besides, it is not I alone. The very noblest in the land may suffer, unless some way be found out of this horrible affair.”

“Pray compose yourself, sir,” said Holmes, “and let me have a clear account of who you are, and what it is that has befallen you.”

“My name,” answered our visitor, “is probably familiar to your ears. I am Alexander Holder, of the banking firm of Holder & Stevenson, of Threadneedle Street.”

The name was indeed well known to us as belonging to the senior partner in the second largest private banking concern in the City of London. What could have happened, then, to bring one of the foremost citizens of London to this most pitiable pass? We waited, all curiosity, until with another effort he braced himself to tell his story.

“I feel that time is of value,” said he; “that is why I hastened here when the police inspector suggested that I should secure your co-operation. I came to Baker Street by the Underground, and hurried from there on foot, for the cabs go slowly through this snow. That is why I was so out of breath, for I am a man who takes very little exercise. I feel better now, and I will put the facts before you as shortly and yet as clearly as I can.

“It is, of course, well known to you that in a successful banking business as much depends upon our being able to find remunerative investments for our funds as upon our increasing our connection and the number of our depositors. One of our most lucrative means of laying out

money is in the shape of loans, where the security is unimpeachable. We have done a good deal in this direction during the last few years, and there are many noble families to whom we have advanced large sums upon the security of their pictures, libraries, or plate.

“Yesterday morning I was seated in my office at the bank when a card was brought in to me by one of the clerks. I started when I saw the name, for it was that of none other than—well, perhaps even to you I had better say no more than that it was a name which is a household word all over the earth—one of the highest, noblest, most exalted names in England. I was overwhelmed by the honor, and attempted, when he entered, to say so, but he plunged at once into business with the air of a man who wishes to hurry quickly through a disagreeable task.

“‘Mr. Holder,’ said he, ‘I have been informed that you are in the habit of advancing money.’

“‘The firm do so when the security is good,’ I answered.

“‘It is absolutely essential to me,’ said he, ‘that I should have £50,000 at once. I could of course borrow so trifling a sum ten times over from my friends, but I much prefer to make it a matter of business, and to carry out that business myself. In my position you can readily understand that it is unwise to place one’s self under obligations.’

“‘For how long, may I ask, do you want this sum?’ I asked.

“‘Next Monday I have a large sum due to me, and I shall then most certainly repay what you advance, with whatever interest you think it right to charge. But it is very essential to me that the money should be paid at once.’

“‘I should be happy to advance it without further parley from my own private purse,’ said I, ‘were it not that the strain would be rather more than it could bear. If, on the other hand, I am to do it in the name of the firm, then in justice to my partner I must insist that, even in your case, every business-like precaution should be taken.’

“‘I should much prefer to have it so,’ said he, raising up a square, black morocco case which he had laid beside his chair. ‘You have doubtless heard of the Beryl Coronet?’

“‘One of the most precious public possessions of the empire,’ said I.

“‘Precisely.’ He opened the case, and there, imbedded in soft, flesh-colored velvet, lay the magnificent piece of jewelry which he had named. ‘There are thirty-nine enormous beryls,’ said he, ‘and the price of the gold chasing is incalculable. The lowest estimate would

put the worth of the coronet at double the sum which I have asked. I am prepared to leave it with you as my security.'

"I took the precious case into my hands and looked in some perplexity from it to my illustrious client.

"'You doubt its value?' he asked.

"'Not at all. I only doubt—'

"'The propriety of my leaving it. You may set your mind at rest about that. I should not dream of doing so were it not absolutely certain that I should be able in four days to reclaim it. It is a pure matter of form. Is the security sufficient?'

"'Ample.'

"'You understand, Mr. Holder, that I am giving you a strong proof of the confidence which I have in you, founded upon all that I have heard of you. I rely upon you not only to be discreet and to refrain from all gossip upon the matter, but, above all, to preserve this coronet with every possible precaution, because I need not say that a great public scandal would be caused if any harm were to befall it. Any injury to it would be almost as serious as its complete loss, for there are no beryls in the world to match these, and it would be impossible to replace them. I leave it with you, however, with every confidence, and I shall call for it in person on Monday morning.'

"Seeing that my client was anxious to leave, I said no more; but, calling for my cashier, I ordered him to pay over fifty £1000 notes. When I was alone once more, however, with the precious case lying upon the table in front of me, I could not but think with some misgivings of the immense responsibility which it entailed upon me. There could be no doubt that, as it was a national possession, a horrible scandal would ensue if any misfortune should occur to it. I already regretted having ever consented to take charge of it. However, it was too late to alter the matter now, so I locked it up in my private safe, and turned once more to my work.

"When evening came I felt that it would be an imprudence to leave so precious a thing in the office behind me. Bankers' safes had been forced before now, and why should not mine be? If so, how terrible would be the position in which I should find myself! I determined, therefore, that for the next few days I would always carry the case backward and forward with me, so that it might never be really out of my reach. With this intention, I called a cab, and drove out to my house at Streatham, carrying the jewel with me. I did not breathe freely until I had taken it up-stairs and locked it in the bureau of my dressing-room.

“And now a word as to my household, Mr. Holmes, for I wish you to thoroughly understand the situation. My groom and my page sleep out of the house, and may be set aside altogether. I have three maid-servants who have been with me a number of years, and whose absolute reliability is quite above suspicion. Another, Lucy Parr, the second waiting-maid, has only been in my service a few months. She came with an excellent character, however, and has always given me satisfaction. She is a very pretty girl, and has attracted admirers who have occasionally hung about the place. That is the only drawback which we have found to her, but we believe her to be a thoroughly good girl in every way.

“So much for the servants. My family itself is so small that it will not take me long to describe it. I am a widower, and have an only son, Arthur. He has been a disappointment to me, Mr. Holmes—a grievous disappointment. I have no doubt that I am myself to blame. People tell me that I have spoiled him. Very likely I have. When my dear wife died I felt that he was all I had to love. I could not bear to see the smile fade even for a moment from his face. I have never denied him a wish. Perhaps it would have been better for both of us had I been sterner, but I meant it for the best.

“It was naturally my intention that he should succeed me in my business, but he was not of a business turn. He was wild, wayward, and, to speak the truth, I could not trust him in the handling of large sums of money. When he was young he became a member of an aristocratic club, and there, having charming manners, he was soon the intimate of a number of men with long purses and expensive habits. He learned to play heavily at cards and to squander money on the turf, until he had again and again to come to me and implore me to give him an advance upon his allowance, that he might settle his debts of honor. He tried more than once to break away from the dangerous company which he was keeping, but each time the influence of his friend Sir George Burnwell was enough to draw him back again.

“And, indeed, I could not wonder that such a man as Sir George Burnwell should gain an influence over him, for he has frequently brought him to my house, and I have found myself that I could hardly resist the fascination of his manner. He is older than Arthur, a man of the world to his finger-tips, one who had been everywhere, seen everything, a brilliant talker, and a man of great personal beauty. Yet when I think of him in cold blood, far away from the glamour of his presence, I am convinced from his cynical speech, and the look which I have caught in his eyes, that he is one who should be deeply distrusted. So I think, and so, too, thinks my little Mary, who has a woman’s quick insight into character.

“And now there is only she to be described. She is my niece; but when my brother died five years ago and left her alone in the world I

adopted her, and have looked upon her ever since as my daughter. She is a sunbeam in my house—sweet, loving, beautiful, a wonderful manager and house-keeper, yet as tender and quiet and gentle as a woman could be. She is my right hand. I do not know what I could do without her. In only one matter has she ever gone against my wishes. Twice my boy has asked her to marry him, for he loves her devotedly, but each time she has refused him. I think that if any one could have drawn him into the right path it would have been she, and that his marriage might have changed his whole life; but now, alas! it is too late—for ever too late!

“Now, Mr. Holmes, you know the people who live under my roof, and I shall continue with my miserable story.

“When we were taking coffee in the drawing-room that night, after dinner, I told Arthur and Mary my experience, and of the precious treasure which we had under our roof, suppressing only the name of my client. Lucy Parr, who had brought in the coffee, had, I am sure, left the room; but I cannot swear that the door was closed. Mary and Arthur were much interested, and wished to see the famous coronet, but I thought it better not to disturb it.

““Where have you put it?’ asked Arthur.

““In my own bureau.’

““Well, I hope to goodness the house won’t be burgled during the night,’ said he.

““It is locked up,’ I answered.

““Oh, any old key will fit that bureau. When I was a youngster I have opened it myself with the key of the box-room cupboard.’

“He often had a wild way of talking, so that I thought little of what he said. He followed me to my room, however, that night with a very grave face.

““Look here, dad,’ said he, with his eyes cast down, ‘can you let me have £200?’

““No, I cannot!’ I answered, sharply. ‘I have been far too generous with you in money matters.’

““You have been very kind,’ said he: ‘but I must have this money, or else I can never show my face inside the club again.’

““And a very good thing, too!’ I cried.

“‘Yes, but you would not have me leave it a dishonored man,’ said he. ‘I could not bear the disgrace. I must raise the money in some way, and if you will not let me have it, then I must try other means.’

“I was very angry, for this was the third demand during the month. ‘You shall not have a farthing from me,’ I cried; on which he bowed and left the room without another word.

“When he was gone I unlocked my bureau, made sure that my treasure was safe, and locked it again. Then I started to go round the house to see that all was secure—a duty which I usually leave to Mary, but which I thought it well to perform myself that night. As I came down the stairs I saw Mary herself at the side window of the hall, which she closed and fastened as I approached.

“‘Tell me, dad,’ said she, looking, I thought, a little disturbed, ‘did you give Lucy, the maid, leave to go out to-night?’

“‘Certainly not.’

“‘She came in just now by the back door. I have no doubt that she has only been to the side gate to see some one; but I think that it is hardly safe, and should be stopped.’

“‘You must speak to her in the morning, or I will, if you prefer it. Are you sure that everything is fastened?’

“‘Quite sure, dad.’

“‘Then, good-night.’ I kissed her, and went up to my bedroom again, where I was soon asleep.

“I am endeavoring to tell you everything, Mr. Holmes, which may have any bearing upon the case, but I beg that you will question me upon any point which I do not make clear.”

“On the contrary, your statement is singularly lucid.”

“I come to a part of my story now in which I should wish to be particularly so. I am not a very heavy sleeper, and the anxiety in my mind tended, no doubt, to make me even less so than usual. About two in the morning, then, I was awakened by some sound in the house. It had ceased ere I was wide awake, but it had left an impression behind it as though a window had gently closed somewhere. I lay listening with all my ears. Suddenly, to my horror, there was a distinct sound of footsteps moving softly in the next room. I slipped out of bed, all palpitating with fear, and peeped round the corner of my dressing-room door.

“‘Arthur!’ I screamed, ‘you villain! you thief! How dare you touch that coronet?’

“The gas was half up, as I had left it, and my unhappy boy, dressed only in his shirt and trousers, was standing beside the light, holding the coronet in his hands. He appeared to be wrenching at it, or bending it with all his strength. At my cry he dropped it from his grasp, and turned as pale as death. I snatched it up and examined it. One of the gold corners, with three of the beryls in it, was missing.

“‘You blackguard!’ I shouted, beside myself with rage. ‘You have destroyed it! You have dishonored me for ever! Where are the jewels which you have stolen?’

“‘Stolen!’ he cried.

“‘Yes, you thief!’ I roared, shaking him by the shoulder.

“‘There are none missing. There cannot be any missing,’ said he.

“‘There are three missing. And you know where they are. Must I call you a liar as well as a thief? Did I not see you trying to tear off another piece?’

“‘You have called me names enough,’ said he; ‘I will not stand it any longer. I shall not say another word about this business since you have chosen to insult me. I will leave your house in the morning and make my own way in the world.’

“‘You shall leave it in the hands of the police!’ I cried, half-mad with grief and rage. ‘I shall have this matter probed to the bottom.’

“‘You shall learn nothing from me,’ said he, with a passion such as I should not have thought was in his nature. ‘If you choose to call the police, let the police find what they can.’

“By this time the whole house was astir, for I had raised my voice in my anger. Mary was the first to rush into my room, and, at the sight of the coronet and of Arthur’s face, she read the whole story, and, with a scream, fell down senseless on the ground. I sent the house-maid for the police, and put the investigation into their hands at once. When the inspector and a constable entered the house, Arthur, who had stood sullenly with his arms folded, asked me whether it was my intention to charge him with theft. I answered that it had ceased to be a private matter, but had become a public one, since the ruined coronet was national property. I was determined that the law should have its way in everything.

“‘At least,’ said he, ‘you will not have me arrested at once. It would

be to your advantage as well as mine if I might leave the house for five minutes.'

"‘That you may get away, or perhaps that you may conceal what you have stolen,’ said I. And then realizing the dreadful position in which I was placed, I implored him to remember that not only my honor, but that of one who was far greater than I was at stake; and that he threatened to raise a scandal which would convulse the nation. He might avert it all if he would but tell me what he had done with the three missing stones.

"‘You may as well face the matter,’ said I; ‘you have been caught in the act, and no confession could make your guilt more heinous. If you but make such reparation as is in your power, by telling us where the beryls are, all shall be forgiven and forgotten.’

"‘Keep your forgiveness for those who ask for it,’ he answered, turning away from me, with a sneer. I saw that he was too hardened for any words of mine to influence him. There was but one way for it. I called in the inspector, and gave him into custody. A search was made at once, not only of his person, but of his room, and of every portion of the house where he could possibly have concealed the gems; but no trace of them could be found, nor would the wretched boy open his mouth for all our persuasions and our threats. This morning he was removed to a cell, and I, after going through all the police formalities, have hurried round to you, to implore you to use your skill in unravelling the matter. The police have openly confessed that they can at present make nothing of it. You may go to any expense which you think necessary. I have already offered a reward of £1000. My God, what shall I do! I have lost my honor, my gems, and my son in one night. Oh, what shall I do!”

He put a hand on either side of his head, and rocked himself to and fro, droning to himself like a child whose grief has got beyond words.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for some few minutes, with his brows knitted and his eyes fixed upon the fire.

"Do you receive much company?" he asked.

"None, save my partner with his family, and an occasional friend of Arthur's. Sir George Burnwell has been several times lately. No one else, I think."

"Do you go out much in society?"

"Arthur does. Mary and I stay at home. We neither of us care for it."

"That is unusual in a young girl."

“She is of a quiet nature. Besides, she is not so very young. She is four-and-twenty.”

“This matter, from what you say, seems to have been a shock to her also.”

“Terrible! She is even more affected than I.”

“You have neither of you any doubt as to your son’s guilt?”

“How can we have, when I saw him with my own eyes with the coronet in his hands.”

“I hardly consider that a conclusive proof. Was the remainder of the coronet at all injured?”

“Yes, it was twisted.”

“Do you not think, then, that he might have been trying to straighten it?”

“God bless you! You are doing what you can for him and for me. But it is too heavy a task. What was he doing there at all? If his purpose were innocent, why did he not say so?”

“Precisely. And if it were guilty, why did he not invent a lie? His silence appears to me to cut both ways. There are several singular points about the case. What did the police think of the noise which awoke you from your sleep?”

“They considered that it might be caused by Arthur’s closing his bedroom door.”

“A likely story! As if a man bent on felony would slam his door so as to wake a household. What did they say, then, of the disappearance of these gems?”

“They are still sounding the planking and probing the furniture in the hope of finding them.”

“Have they thought of looking outside the house?”

“Yes, they have shown extraordinary energy. The whole garden has already been minutely examined.”

“Now, my dear sir,” said Holmes, “is it not obvious to you now that this matter really strikes very much deeper than either you or the police were at first inclined to think? It appeared to you to be a simple case; to me it seems exceedingly complex. Consider what is

involved by your theory. You suppose that your son came down from his bed, went, at great risk, to your dressing-room, opened your bureau, took out your coronet, broke off by main force a small portion of it, went off to some other place, concealed three gems out of the thirty-nine, with such skill that nobody can find them, and then returned with the other thirty-six into the room in which he exposed himself to the greatest danger of being discovered. I ask you now, is such a theory tenable?"

"But what other is there?" cried the banker, with a gesture of despair. "If his motives were innocent, why does he not explain them?"

"It is our task to find that out," replied Holmes; "so now, if you please, Mr. Holder, we will set off for Streatham together, and devote an hour to glancing a little more closely into details."

My friend insisted upon my accompanying them in their expedition, which I was eager enough to do, for my curiosity and sympathy were deeply stirred by the story to which we had listened. I confess that the guilt of the banker's son appeared to me to be as obvious as it did to his unhappy father, but still I had such faith in Holmes's judgment that I felt that there must be some grounds for hope as long as he was dissatisfied with the accepted explanation. He hardly spoke a word the whole way out to the southern suburb, but sat with his chin upon his breast and his hat drawn over his eyes, sunk in the deepest thought. Our client appeared to have taken fresh heart at the little glimpse of hope which had been presented to him, and he even broke into a desultory chat with me over his business affairs. A short railway journey and a shorter walk brought us to Fairbank, the modest residence of the great financier.

Fairbank was a good-sized square house of white stone, standing back a little from the road. A double carriage-sweep, with a snow-clad lawn, stretched down in front to two large iron gates which closed the entrance. On the right side was a small wooden thicket, which led into a narrow path between two neat hedges stretching from the road to the kitchen door, and forming the tradesmen's entrance. On the left ran a lane which led to the stables, and was not itself within the grounds at all, being a public, though little used, thoroughfare. Holmes left us standing at the door, and walked slowly all round the house, across the front, down the tradesmen's path, and so round by the garden behind into the stable lane. So long was he that Mr. Holder and I went into the dining-room and waited by the fire until he should return. We were sitting there in silence when the door opened and a young lady came in. She was rather above the middle height, slim, with dark hair and eyes, which seemed the darker against the absolute pallor of her skin. I do not think that I have ever seen such deadly paleness in a woman's face. Her lips, too, were bloodless, but her eyes were flushed with crying. As she swept silently into the room she impressed me with a greater

sense of grief than the banker had done in the morning, and it was the more striking in her as she was evidently a woman of strong character, with immense capacity for self-restraint. Disregarding my presence, she went straight to her uncle, and passed her hand over his head with a sweet womanly caress.

“You have given orders that Arthur should be liberated, have you not, dad?” she asked.

“No, no, my girl, the matter must be probed to the bottom.”

“But I am so sure that he is innocent. You know what women’s instincts are. I know that he has done no harm and that you will be sorry for having acted so harshly.”

“Why is he silent, then, if he is innocent?”

“Who knows? Perhaps because he was so angry that you should suspect him.”

“How could I help suspecting him, when I actually saw him with the coronet in his hand?”

“Oh, but he had only picked it up to look at it. Oh do, do take my word for it that he is innocent. Let the matter drop and say no more. It is so dreadful to think of our dear Arthur in prison!”

“I shall never let it drop until the gems are found—never, Mary! Your affection for Arthur blinds you as to the awful consequences to me. Far from hushing the thing up, I have brought a gentleman down from London to inquire more deeply into it.”

“This gentleman?” she asked, facing round to me.

“No, his friend. He wished us to leave him alone. He is round in the stable lane now.”

“The stable lane?” She raised her dark eyebrows. “What can he hope to find there? Ah! this, I suppose, is he. I trust, sir, that you will succeed in proving, what I feel sure is the truth, that my cousin Arthur is innocent of this crime.”

“I fully share your opinion, and I trust, with you, that we may prove it,” returned Holmes, going back to the mat to knock the snow from his shoes. “I believe I have the honor of addressing Miss Mary Holder. Might I ask you a question or two?”

“Pray do, sir, if it may help to clear this horrible affair up.”

“You heard nothing yourself last night?”

“Nothing, until my uncle here began to speak loudly. I heard that, and I came down.”

“You shut up the windows and doors the night before. Did you fasten all the windows?”

“Yes.”

“Were they all fastened this morning?”

“Yes.”

“You have a maid who has a sweetheart? I think that you remarked to your uncle last night that she had been out to see him?”

“Yes, and she was the girl who waited in the drawing-room, and who may have heard uncle’s remarks about the coronet.”

“I see. You infer that she may have gone out to tell her sweetheart, and that the two may have planned the robbery.”

“But what is the good of all these vague theories,” cried the banker, impatiently, “when I have told you that I saw Arthur with the coronet in his hands?”

“Wait a little, Mr. Holder. We must come back to that. About this girl, Miss Holder. You saw her return by the kitchen door, I presume?”

“Yes; when I went to see if the door was fastened for the night I met her slipping in. I saw the man, too, in the gloom.”

“Do you know him?”

“Oh yes; he is the green-grocer who brings our vegetables round. His name is Francis Prosper.”

“He stood,” said Holmes, “to the left of the door—that is to say, farther up the path than is necessary to reach the door?”

“Yes, he did.”

“And he is a man with a wooden leg?”

Something like fear sprang up in the young lady’s expressive black eyes. “Why, you are like a magician,” said she. “How do you know that?” She smiled, but there was no answering smile in Holmes’s thin, eager face.

"I should be very glad now to go up-stairs," said he. "I shall probably wish to go over the outside of the house again. Perhaps I had better take a look at the lower windows before I go up."

He walked swiftly round from one to the other, pausing only at the large one which looked from the hall onto the stable lane. This he opened, and made a very careful examination of the sill with his powerful magnifying lens. "Now we shall go up-stairs," said he, at last.

The banker's dressing-room was a plainly furnished little chamber, with a gray carpet, a large bureau, and a long mirror. Holmes went to the bureau first and looked hard at the lock.

"Which key was used to open it?" he asked.

"That which my son himself indicated—that of the cupboard of the lumber-room."

"Have you it here?"

"That is it on the dressing-table."

Sherlock Holmes took it up and opened the bureau.

"It is a noiseless lock," said he. "It is no wonder that it did not wake you. This case, I presume, contains the coronet. We must have a look at it." He opened the case, and, taking out the diadem, he laid it upon the table. It was a magnificent specimen of the jeweller's art, and the thirty-six stones were the finest that I have ever seen. At one side of the coronet was a cracked edge, where a corner holding three gems had been torn away.

"Now, Mr. Holder," said Holmes, "here is the corner which corresponds to that which has been so unfortunately lost. Might I beg that you will break it off."

The banker recoiled in horror. "I should not dream of trying," said he.

"Then I will." Holmes suddenly bent his strength upon it, but without result. "I feel it give a little," said he; "but, though I am exceptionally strong in the fingers, it would take me all my time to break it. An ordinary man could not do it. Now, what do you think would happen if I did break it, Mr. Holder? There would be a noise like a pistol shot. Do you tell me that all this happened within a few yards of your bed, and that you heard nothing of it?"

"I do not know what to think. It is all dark to me."

“But perhaps it may grow lighter as we go. What do you think, Miss Holder?”

“I confess that I still share my uncle’s perplexity.”

“Your son had no shoes or slippers on when you saw him?”

“He had nothing on save only his trousers and shirt.”

“Thank you. We have certainly been favored with extraordinary luck during this inquiry, and it will be entirely our own fault if we do not succeed in clearing the matter up. With your permission, Mr. Holder, I shall now continue my investigations outside.”

He went alone, at his own request, for he explained that any unnecessary footmarks might make his task more difficult. For an hour or more he was at work, returning at last with his feet heavy with snow and his features as inscrutable as ever.

“I think that I have seen now all that there is to see, Mr. Holder,” said he; “I can serve you best by returning to my rooms.”

“But the gems, Mr. Holmes. Where are they?”

“I cannot tell.”

The banker wrung his hands. “I shall never see them again!” he cried. “And my son? You give me hopes?”

“My opinion is in no way altered.”

“Then, for God’s sake, what was this dark business which was acted in my house last night?”

“If you can call upon me at my Baker Street rooms to-morrow morning between nine and ten I shall be happy to do what I can to make it clearer. I understand that you give me *_carte blanche_* to act for you, provided only that I get back the gems, and that you place no limit on the sum I may draw.”

“I would give my fortune to have them back.”

“Very good. I shall look into the matter between this and then. Good-bye; it is just possible that I may have to come over here again before evening.”

It was obvious to me that my companion’s mind was now made up about the case, although what his conclusions were was more than I could even dimly imagine. Several times during our homeward journey I

endeavored to sound him upon the point, but he always glided away to some other topic, until at last I gave it over in despair. It was not yet three when we found ourselves in our room once more. He hurried to his chamber, and was down again in a few minutes dressed as a common loafer. With his collar turned up, his shiny, seedy coat, his red cravat, and his worn boots, he was a perfect sample of the class.

“I think that this should do,” said he, glancing into the glass above the fireplace. “I only wish that you could come with me, Watson, but I fear that it won’t do. I may be on the trail in this matter, or I may be following a will-of-the-wisp, but I shall soon know which it is. I hope that I may be back in a few hours.” He cut a slice of beef from the joint upon the sideboard, sandwiched it between two rounds of bread, and, thrusting this rude meal into his pocket, he started off upon his expedition.

I had just finished my tea when he returned, evidently in excellent spirits, swinging an old elastic-sided boot in his hand. He chucked it down into a corner and helped himself to a cup of tea.

“I only looked in as I passed,” said he. “I am going right on.”

“Where to?”

“Oh, to the other side of the West End. It may be some time before I get back. Don’t wait up for me in case I should be late.”

“How are you getting on?”

“Oh, so so. Nothing to complain of. I have been out to Streatham since I saw you last, but I did not call at the house. It is a very sweet little problem, and I would not have missed it for a good deal. However, I must not sit gossiping here, but must get these disreputable clothes off and return to my highly respectable self.”

I could see by his manner that he had stronger reasons for satisfaction than his words alone would imply. His eyes twinkled, and there was even a touch of color upon his sallow cheeks. He hastened up-stairs, and a few minutes later I heard the slam of the hall door, which told me that he was off once more upon his congenial hunt.

I waited until midnight, but there was no sign of his return, so I retired to my room. It was no uncommon thing for him to be away for days and nights on end when he was hot upon a scent, so that his lateness caused me no surprise. I do not know at what hour he came in, but when I came down to breakfast in the morning, there he was with a cup of coffee in one hand and the paper in the other, as fresh and trim as possible.

“You will excuse my beginning without you, Watson,” said he; “but you remember that our client has rather an early appointment this morning.”

“Why, it is after nine now,” I answered. “I should not be surprised if that were he. I thought I heard a ring.”

It was, indeed, our friend the financier. I was shocked by the change which had come over him, for his face, which was naturally of a broad and massive mould, was now pinched and fallen in, while his hair seemed to me at least a shade whiter. He entered with a weariness and lethargy which was even more painful than his violence of the morning before, and he dropped heavily into the arm-chair which I pushed forward for him.

“I do not know what I have done to be so severely tried,” said he. “Only two days ago I was a happy and prosperous man, without a care in the world. Now I am left to a lonely and dishonored age. One sorrow comes close upon the heels of another. My niece, Mary, has deserted me.”

“Deserted you?”

“Yes. Her bed this morning had not been slept in, her room was empty, and a note for me lay upon the hall table. I had said to her last night, in sorrow and not in anger, that if she had married my boy all might have been well with him. Perhaps it was thoughtless of me to say so. It is to that remark that she refers in this note:

“‘MY DEAREST UNCLE,—I feel that I have brought trouble upon you, and that if I had acted differently this terrible misfortune might never have occurred. I cannot, with this thought in my mind, ever again be happy under your roof, and I feel that I must leave you for ever. Do not worry about my future, for that is provided for; and, above all, do not search for me, for it will be fruitless labor and an ill-service to me. In life or in death, I am ever your loving MARY.’

“What could she mean by that note, Mr. Holmes? Do you think it points to suicide?”

“No, no, nothing of the kind. It is perhaps the best possible solution. I trust, Mr. Holder, that you are nearing the end of your troubles.”

“Ha! You say so! You have heard something, Mr. Holmes; you have learned something! Where are the gems?”

“You would not think £1000 apiece an excessive sum for them?”

“I would pay ten.”

“That would be unnecessary. Three thousand will cover the matter. And there is a little reward, I fancy. Have you your check-book? Here is a pen. Better make it out for £4000 pounds.”

With a dazed face the banker made out the required check. Holmes walked over to his desk, took out a little triangular piece of gold with three gems in it, and threw it down upon the table.

With a shriek of joy our client clutched it up.

“You have it!” he gasped. “I am saved! I am saved!”

The reaction of joy was as passionate as his grief had been, and he hugged his recovered gems to his bosom.

“There is one other thing you owe, Mr. Holder,” said Sherlock Holmes, rather sternly.

“Owe!” He caught up a pen. “Name the sum, and I will pay it.”

“No, the debt is not to me. You owe a very humble apology to that noble lad, your son, who has carried himself in this matter as I should be proud to see my own son do, should I ever chance to have one.”

“Then it was not Arthur who took them?”

“I told you yesterday, and I repeat to-day, that it was not.”

“You are sure of it! Then let us hurry to him at once, to let him know that the truth is known.”

“He knows it already. When I had cleared it all up I had an interview with him, and, finding that he would not tell me the story, I told it to him, on which he had to confess that I was right, and to add the very few details which were not yet quite clear to me. Your news of this morning, however, may open his lips.”

“For Heaven’s sake, tell me, then, what is this extraordinary mystery!”

“I will do so, and I will show you the steps by which I reached it. And let me say to you, first, that which it is hardest for me to say and for you to hear: there has been an understanding between Sir George Burnwell and your niece Mary. They have now fled together.”

“My Mary? Impossible!”

“It is, unfortunately, more than possible; it is certain. Neither you nor your son knew the true character of this man when you admitted him into your family circle. He is one of the most dangerous men in

England—a ruined gambler, an absolutely desperate villain, a man without heart or conscience. Your niece knew nothing of such men. When he breathed his vows to her, as he had done to a hundred before her, she flattered herself that she alone had touched his heart. The devil knows best what he said, but at least she became his tool, and was in the habit of seeing him nearly every evening.”

“I cannot, and I will not, believe it!” cried the banker, with an ashen face.

“I will tell you, then, what occurred in your house last night. Your niece, when you had, as she thought, gone to your room, slipped down and talked to her lover through the window which leads into the stable lane. His footmarks had pressed right through the snow, so long had he stood there. She told him of the coronet. His wicked lust for gold kindled at the news, and he bent her to his will. I have no doubt that she loved you, but there are women in whom the love of a lover extinguishes all other loves, and I think that she must have been one. She had hardly listened to his instructions when she saw you coming down-stairs, on which she closed the window rapidly, and told you about one of the servants’ escapade with her wooden-legged lover, which was all perfectly true.

“Your boy, Arthur, went to bed after his interview with you, but he slept badly on account of his uneasiness about his club debts. In the middle of the night he heard a soft tread pass his door, so he rose, and looking out, was surprised to see his cousin walking very stealthily along the passage, until she disappeared into your dressing-room. Petrified with astonishment, the lad slipped on some clothes, and waited there in the dark to see what would come of this strange affair. Presently she emerged from the room again, and in the light of the passage-lamp your son saw that she carried the precious coronet in her hands. She passed down the stairs, and he, thrilling with horror, ran along and slipped behind the curtain near your door, whence he could see what passed in the hall beneath. He saw her stealthily open the window, hand out the coronet to some one in the gloom, and then closing it once more hurry back to her room, passing quite close to where he stood hid behind the curtain.

“As long as she was on the scene he could not take any action without a horrible exposure of the woman whom he loved. But the instant that she was gone he realized how crushing a misfortune this would be for you, and how all-important it was to set it right. He rushed down, just as he was, in his bare feet, opened the window, sprang out into the snow, and ran down the lane, where he could see a dark figure in the moonlight. Sir George Burnwell tried to get away, but Arthur caught him, and there was a struggle between them, your lad tugging at one side of the coronet, and his opponent at the other. In the scuffle, your son struck Sir George, and cut him over the eye. Then something

suddenly snapped, and your son, finding that he had the coronet in his hands, rushed back, closed the window, ascended to your room, and had just observed that the coronet had been twisted in the struggle, and was endeavoring to straighten it when you appeared upon the scene.”

“Is it possible?” gasped the banker.

“You then roused his anger by calling him names at a moment when he felt that he had deserved your warmest thanks. He could not explain the true state of affairs without betraying one who certainly deserved little enough consideration at his hands. He took the more chivalrous view, however, and preserved her secret.”

“And that was why she shrieked and fainted when she saw the coronet,” cried Mr. Holder. “Oh, my God! what a blind fool I have been! And his asking to be allowed to go out for five minutes! The dear fellow wanted to see if the missing piece were at the scene of the struggle. How cruelly I have misjudged him!”

“When I arrived at the house,” continued Holmes, “I at once went very carefully round it to observe if there were any traces in the snow which might help me. I knew that none had fallen since the evening before, and also that there had been a strong frost to preserve impressions. I passed along the tradesmen’s path, but found it all trampled down and indistinguishable. Just beyond it, however, at the far side of the kitchen door, a woman had stood and talked with a man, whose round impressions on one side showed that he had a wooden leg. I could even tell that they had been disturbed, for the woman had run back swiftly to the door, as was shown by the deep toe and light heel marks, while Wooden-leg had waited a little, and then had gone away. I thought at the time that this might be the maid and her sweetheart, of whom you had already spoken to me, and inquiry showed it was so. I passed round the garden without seeing anything more than random tracks, which I took to be the police; but when I got into the stable lane a very long and complex story was written in the snow in front of me.

“There was a double line of tracks of a booted man, and a second double line which I saw with delight belonged to a man with naked feet. I was at once convinced from what you had told me that the latter was your son. The first had walked both ways, but the other had run swiftly, and, as his tread was marked in places over the depression of the boot, it was obvious that he had passed after the other. I followed them up, and found that they led to the hall window, where Boots had worn all the snow away while waiting. Then I walked to the other end, which was a hundred yards or more down the lane. I saw where Boots had faced round, where the snow was cut up as though there had been a struggle, and, finally, where a few drops of blood had fallen, to show me that I was not mistaken. Boots had then run down the lane, and another little

smudge of blood showed that it was he who had been hurt. When he came to the high-road at the other end, I found that the pavement had been cleared, so there was an end to that clew.

“On entering the house, however, I examined, as you remember, the sill and framework of the hall window with my lens, and I could at once see that some one had passed out. I could distinguish the outline of an instep where the wet foot had been placed in coming in. I was then beginning to be able to form an opinion as to what had occurred. A man had waited outside the window, some one had brought the gems; the deed had been overseen by your son, he had pursued the thief, had struggled with him, they had each tugged at the coronet, their united strength causing injuries which neither alone could have effected. He had returned with the prize, but had left a fragment in the grasp of his opponent. So far I was clear. The question now was, who was the man, and who was it brought him the coronet?

“It is an old maxim of mine that when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Now, I knew that it was not you who had brought it down, so there only remained your niece and the maids. But if it were the maids, why should your son allow himself to be accused in their place? There could be no possible reason. As he loved his cousin, however, there was an excellent explanation why he should retain her secret—the more so as the secret was a disgraceful one. When I remembered that you had seen her at that window, and how she had fainted on seeing the coronet again, my conjecture became a certainty.

“And who could it be who was her confederate? A lover evidently, for who else could outweigh the love and gratitude which she must feel to you? I knew that you went out little, and that your circle of friends was a very limited one. But among them was Sir George Burnwell. I had heard of him before as being a man of evil reputation among women. It must have been he who wore those boots and retained the missing gems. Even though he knew that Arthur had discovered him, he might still flatter himself that he was safe, for the lad could not say a word without compromising his own family.

“Well, your own good sense will suggest what measures I took next. I went in the shape of a loafer to Sir George’s house, managed to pick up an acquaintance with his valet, learned that his master had cut his head the night before, and, finally, at the expense of six shillings, made all sure by buying a pair of his cast-off shoes. With these I journeyed down to Streatham, and saw that they exactly fitted the tracks.”

[Illustration: “I CLAPPED A PISTOL TO HIS HEAD”]

“I saw an ill-dressed vagabond in the lane yesterday evening,” said Mr.

Holder.

“Precisely. It was I. I found that I had my man, so I came home and changed my clothes. It was a delicate part which I had to play then, for I saw that a prosecution must be avoided to avert scandal, and I knew that so astute a villain would see that our hands were tied in the matter. I went and saw him. At first, of course, he denied everything. But when I gave him every particular that had occurred, he tried to bluster, and took down a life-preserver from the wall. I knew my man, however, and I clapped a pistol to his head before he could strike. Then he became a little more reasonable. I told him that we would give him a price for the stones he held—£1000 apiece. That brought out the first signs of grief that he had shown. ‘Why, dash it all!’ said he, ‘I’ve let them go at six hundred for the three!’ I soon managed to get the address of the receiver who had them, on promising him that there would be no prosecution. Off I set to him, and after much chaffering I got our stones at £1000 apiece. Then I looked in upon your son, told him that all was right, and eventually got to my bed about two o’clock, after what I may call a really hard day’s work.”

“A day which has saved England from a great public scandal,” said the banker, rising. “Sir, I cannot find words to thank you, but you shall not find me ungrateful for what you have done. Your skill has indeed exceeded all that I have heard of it. And now I must fly to my dear boy to apologize to him for the wrong which I have done him. As to what you tell me of poor Mary, it goes to my very heart. Not even your skill can inform me where she is now.”

“I think that we may safely say,” returned Holmes, “that she is wherever Sir George Burnwell is. It is equally certain, too, that whatever her sins are, they will soon receive a more than sufficient punishment.”

from: Project Gutenberg's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, by A. Conan Doyle

THE SOLID GOLD REEF COMPANY, LIMITED

by Walter Besant

(*In Deacon's Orders and Other Stories*, New York: Harper and Bros., 1895)

Act I

'You dear old boy,' said the girl, 'I am sure I wish it could be, with all my heart, if I have any heart.'

'I don't believe you have,' replied the boy gloomily.

'Well, but, Reg, consider; you've got no money.'

'I've got five thousand pounds. If a man can't make his way upon that he must be a poor stick.'

'You would go abroad with it and dig, and take your wife with you--to wash and cook.'

'We would do something with the money here. You should stay in London, Rosie.'

'Yes. In a suburban villa, at Shepherd's Bush, perhaps. No, Reg, when I marry, if ever I do--I am in no hurry--I will step out of this room into one exactly like it.' The room was a splendid drawing-room in Palace Gardens, splendidly furnished. 'I shall have my footmen and my carriage, and I shall--'

'Rosie, give me the right to earn all these things for you!' the young man cried impetuously.

'You can only earn them for me by the time you have one foot in the grave. Hadn't I better in the meantime marry some old gentleman with his one foot in the grave, so as to be ready for you against the time you come home? In two or three years the other foot, I dare say, would slide into the grave as well.'

'You laugh at my trouble. You feel nothing.'

'If the pater would part, but he won't; he says he wants all his money for himself, and that I've got to marry well. Besides, Reg'--here her face clouded and she lowered her voice--'there are times when he looks anxious. We didn't always live in Palace Gardens. Suppose we should lose it all as quickly as we got it. Oh!' she shivered and trembled. 'No, I will never, never marry a poor man. Get rich, my dear boy, and you may aspire even to the valuable possession of this heartless hand.'

She held it out. He took it, pressed it, stooped and kissed her. Then he dropped her hand and walked quickly out of the room.

'Poor Reggie!' she murmured. 'I wish--I wish--but what is the use of wishing?'

Act II

Two men--one young, the other about fifty--sat in the veranda of a

small bungalow. It was after breakfast. They lay back in long bamboo chairs, each with a cigar. It looked as if they were resting. In reality they were talking business, and that very seriously.

'Yes, sir,' said the elder man, with something of an American accent, 'I have somehow taken a fancy to this place. The situation is healthy.'

'Well, I don't know; I've had more than one touch of fever here.'

'The climate is lovely--'

'Except in the rains.'

'The soil is fertile--'

'I've dropped five thousand in it, and they haven't come up again yet.'

'They will. I have been round the estate, and I see money in it. Well, sir, here's my offer: five thousand down, hard cash, as soon as the papers are signed.'

Reginald sat up. He was on the point of accepting the proposal, when a pony rode up to the house, and the rider, a native groom, jumped off and gave him a note. He opened it and read. It was from his nearest neighbour, two or three miles away:

Don't sell that man your estate. Gold has been found. The whole country is full of gold. Hold on. He's an assayer. If he offers to buy, be quite sure that he has found gold on your land.

F.G.

He put the note into his pocket, gave a verbal message to the boy, and turned to his guest, without betraying the least astonishment or emotion.

'I beg your pardon. The note was from Bellamy, my next neighbour. Well? You were saying--'

'Only that I have taken a fancy--perhaps a foolish fancy--to this place of yours, and I'll give you, if you like, all that you have spent upon it.'

'Well,' he replied reflectively, but with a little twinkle in his eye, 'that seems handsome. But the place isn't really worth the half that I spent upon it. Anybody would tell you that. Come, let us be honest,

whatever we are. I'll tell you a better way. We will put the matter into the hands of Bellamy. He knows what a coffee plantation is worth. He shall name a price, and if we can agree upon that, we will make a deal of it.'

The other man changed colour. He wanted to settle the thing at once as between gentlemen. What need of third parties? But Reginald stood firm, and he presently rode away, quite sure that in a day or two this planter, too, would have heard the news.

A month later, the young coffee-planter stood on the deck of a steamer homeward bound. In his pocket-book was a plan of his auriferous estate; in a bag hanging round his neck was a small collection of yellow nuggets; in his boxes was a chosen assortment of quartz.

Act III

'Well, sir,' said the financier, 'you've brought this thing to me. You want my advice. Well, my advice is, don't fool away the only good thing that will ever happen to you. Luck such as this doesn't come more than once in a lifetime.'

'I have been offered ten thousand pounds for my estate.'

'Oh! Have you! Ten thousand? That was very liberal--very liberal indeed. Ten thousand for a gold reef!'

'But I thought as an old friend of my father you would, perhaps--'

'Young man, don't fool it away. He's waiting for you, I suppose, round the corner, with a bottle of fizz, ready to close.'

'He is.'

'Well, go and drink his champagne. Always get whatever you can. And then tell him that you'll see him--'

'I certainly will, sir, if you advise it. And then?'

'And then--leave it to me. And, young man, I think I heard, a year or two ago, something about you and my girl Rosie.'

'There was something, sir. Not enough to trouble you about it.'

'She told me. Rosie tells me all her love affairs.'

'Is she--is she unmarried?'

'Oh, yes! and for the moment I believe she is free. She has had one or two engagements, but, somehow, they have come to nothing. There was the French count, but that was knocked on the head very early in consequence of things discovered. And there was the Boom in Guano, but he fortunately smashed, much to Rosie's joy, because she never liked him. The last was Lord Evergreen. He was a nice old chap when you could understand what he said, and Rosie would have liked the title very much, though his grandchildren opposed the thing. Well, sir, I suppose you couldn't understand the trouble we took to keep that old man alive for his own wedding. Science did all it could, but 'twas of no use--' The financier sighed. 'The ways of Providence are inscrutable. He died, sir, the day before.'

'That was very sad.'

'A dashing of the cup from the lip, sir. My daughter would have been a countess. Well, young gentleman, about this estate of yours. I think I see a way--I think, I am not yet sure--that I do see a way. Go now. See this liberal gentleman, and drink his champagne. And come here in a week. Then, if I still see my way, you shall understand what it means to hold the position in the City which is mine.'

'And--and--may I call upon Rosie!'

'Not till this day week--not till I have made my way plain.'

Act IV

'And so it means this. Oh, Rosie, you look lovelier than ever, and I'm as happy as a king. It means this. Your father is the greatest genius in the world. He buys my property for sixty thousand pounds--sixty thousand. That's over two thousand a year for me, and he makes a company out of it with a hundred and fifty thousand capital. He says that, taking ten thousand out of it for expenses, there will be a profit of eighty thousand. And all that he gives to you--eighty thousand, that's three thousand a year for you; and sixty thousand, that's two more, my dearest Rosie. You remember what you said, that when you married you should step out of one room like this into another just as good?'

'Oh, Reggie,' she sank upon his bosom--'you know I never could love anybody but you. It's true I was engaged to old Lord Evergreen, but that was only because he had one foot--you know--and when the other foot went in too, just a day too soon, I actually laughed. So the pater is going to make a company of it, is he? Well, I hope he won't put any of his own money into it, I'm sure, because of late all the

companies have turned out so badly.'

'But, my child, the place is full of gold.'

'Then why did he turn it into a company, my dear boy? And why didn't he make you stick to it? But you know nothing of the City. Now, let us sit down and talk about what we shall do--don't, you ridiculous boy!'

Act V

Another house just like the first. The bride stepped out of one palace into another. With their five or six thousand a year, the young couple could just manage to make both ends meet. The husband was devoted; the wife had everything that she could wish. Who could be happier than this pair in a nest so luxurious, their life so padded, their days so full of sunshine?

It was a year after marriage. The wife, contrary to her usual custom, was the first at breakfast. A few letters were waiting for her--chiefly invitations. She opened and read them. Among them lay one addressed to her husband. Not looking at the address, she opened and read that as well:

Dear Reginald:

I venture to address you as an old friend of your own and school-fellow of your mother's. I am a widow with four children. My husband was the vicar of your old parish--you remember him and me. I was left with a little income of about two hundred a year. Twelve months ago I was persuaded in order to double my income--a thing which seemed certain from the prospectus--to invest everything in a new and rich gold mine. Everything. And the mine has never paid anything. The company--it is called the Solid Gold Reef Company, is in liquidation because, though there is really the gold there, it costs too much to get it. I have no relatives anywhere to help me. Unless I can get assistance my children and I must go at once--tomorrow--into the workhouse. Yes, we are paupers. I am ruined by the cruel lies of that prospectus, and the wickedness which deluded me, and I know not how many others, out of my money. I have been foolish, and am punished; but those people, who will punish them? Help me, if you can, my dear Reginald. Oh! for _GOD'S_ sake, help my children and me. Help your mother's friend, your own old friend.

'This,' said Rosie meditatively, 'is exactly the kind of thing to make Reggie uncomfortable. Why, it might make him unhappy all day. Better

burn it.' She dropped the letter into the fire. 'He's an impulsive, emotional nature, and he doesn't understand the City. If people are so foolish--What a lot of fibs the poor old pater does tell, to be sure! He's a regular novelist--Oh! here you are, you lazy boy!'

'Kiss me, Rosie.' He looked as handsome as Apollo, and as cheerful. 'I wish all the world were as happy as you and me. Heigho! some poor devils, I'm afraid--'

'Tea or coffee, Reg?'

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Victorian Short Stories, Stories of Successful Marriages*

YOU'VE GOT TO BE SELFISH

When you try to do a story about three people like Sid Hahn and Mizzi Markis and Wallie Ascher you find yourself pawing around among the personalities helplessly. For the three of them are what is known in newspaper parlance as national figures. One n.f. is enough for any short story. Three would swamp a book. It's like one of those plays advertised as having an all-star cast. By the time each luminary has come on, and been greeted, and done his twinkling the play has faded into the background. You can't see the heavens for the stars.

Surely Sid Hahn, like the guest of honour at a dinner, needs no introduction. And just as surely will he be introduced. He has been described elsewhere and often; perhaps nowhere more concisely than on Page 16, paragraph two, of a volume that shall be nameless, though quoted, thus:

"Sid Hahn, erstwhile usher, call-boy, press agent, advance man, had a genius for things theatrical. It was inborn. Dramatic, sensitive, artistic, intuitive, he was often rendered inarticulate by the very force and variety of his feelings. A little, rotund, ugly man, with the eyes of a dreamer, the wide, mobile mouth of a humourist, the ears of a comic ol' clo'es man. His generosity was proverbial, and it amounted to a vice."

Not that that covers him. No one paragraph could. You turn a fine diamond this way and that, and as its facets catch the light you say, "It's scarlet! No--it's blue! No--rose!--orange!--lilac!--no--"

That was Sid Hahn.

I suppose he never really sat for a photograph and yet you saw his likeness in all the magazines. He was snapped on the street, and in the

theatre, and even up in his famous library-study-office on the sixth and top floor of the Thalia Theatre Building. Usually with a fat black cigar--unlighted--in one corner of his commodious mouth. Everyone interested in things theatrical (and whom does that not include!) knew all about Sid Hahn--and nothing. He had come, a boy, from one of those middle-western towns with a high-falutin Greek name. Parthenon, Ohio, or something incredible like that. No one knows how he first approached the profession which he was to dominate in America. There's no record of his having asked for a job in a theatre, and received it. He oozed into it, indefinably, and moved with it, and became a part of it and finally controlled it. Satellites, fur-collared and pseudo-successful, trailing in his wake, used to talk loudly of I-knew-him-when. They all lied. It had been Augustin Daly, dead these many years, who had first recognized in this boy the genius for discovering and directing genius. Daly was, at that time, at the zenith of his career--managing, writing, directing, producing. He fired the imagination of this stocky, gargoyle-faced boy with the luminous eyes and the humorous mouth. I don't know that Sid Hahn, hanging about the theatre in every kind of menial capacity, ever said to himself in so many words:

"I'm going to be what he is. I'm going to concentrate on it. I won't let anything or anybody interfere with it. Nobody knows what I'm going to be. But I know.... And you've got to be selfish. You've got to be selfish."

Of course no one ever really made a speech like that to himself, even in the Horatio Alger books. But if the great ambition and determination running through the whole fibre of his being could have been crystallized into spoken words they would have sounded like that.

By the time he was forty-five he had discovered more stars than Copernicus. They were not all first-magnitude twinklers. Some of them even glowed so feebly that you could see their light only when he stood behind them, the steady radiance of his genius shining through. But taken as a whole they made a brilliant constellation, furnishing much of the illumination for the brightest thoroughfare in the world.

He had never married. There are those who say that he had had an early love affair, but that he had sworn not to marry until he had achieved what he called success. And by that time it had been too late. It was as though the hot flame of ambition had burned out all his other passions. Later they say he was responsible for more happy marriages contracted by people who did not know that he was responsible for them than a popular east-side shadchen. He grew a little tired, perhaps, of playing with make-believe stage characters, and directing them, so he began to play with real ones, like God. But always kind.

No woman can resist making love to a man as indifferent as Sid Hahn appeared to be. They all tried their wiles on him: the red-haired

ingénues, the blonde soubrettes, the stately leading ladies, the war horses, the old-timers, the ponies, the prima donnas. He used to sit there in his great, luxurious, book-lined inner office, smiling and inscrutable as a plump joss-house idol while the fair ones burnt incense and made offering of shew-bread. Figuratively, he kicked over the basket of shew-bread, and of the incense said, "Take away that stuff! It smells!"

Not that he hated women. He was afraid of them, at first. Then, from years of experience with the femininity of the theatre, not nearly afraid enough. So, early, he had locked that corner of his mind, and had thrown away the key. When, years after, he broke in the door, lo! (as they say when an elaborate figure of speech is being used) lo! the treasures therein had turned to dust and ashes.

It was he who had brought over from Paris to the American stage the famous Renée Paterne of the incorrigible eyes. She made a fortune and swept the country with her song about those delinquent orbs. But when she turned them on Hahn, in their first interview in his office, he regarded her with what is known as a long, level look. She knew at that time not a word of English. Sid Hahn was ignorant of French. He said, very low, and with terrible calm to Wallie Ascher who was then acting as a sort of secretary, "Wallie, can't you do something to make her stop rolling her eyes around at me like that? It's awful! She makes me think of those heads you shy balls at, out at Coney. Take away my ink-well."

Renée had turned swiftly to Wallie and had said something to him in French. Sid Hahn cocked a quick ear. "What's that she said?"

"She says," translated the obliging and gifted Wallie, "that monsieur is a woman-hater."

"My God! I thought she didn't understand English!"

"She doesn't. But she's a woman. Not only that, she's a French woman. They don't need to know a language to understand it."

"Where did you get that, h'm? That wasn't included in your Berlitz course, was it?"

Wallie Ascher had grinned--that winning flash lighting up his dark, keen face. "No. I learned that in another school."

Wallie Ascher's early career in the theatre, if repeated here, might almost be a tiresome repetition of Hahn's beginning. And what Augustin Daly had been to Sid Hahn's imagination and ambition, Sid Hahn was to Wallie's. Wallie, though, had been born to the theatre--if having a tumbler for a father and a prestidigitator's foil for a mother can be said to be a legitimate entrance into the world of the theatre.

He had been employed about the old Thalia for years before Hahn noticed him. In the beginning he was a spindle-legged office boy in the upstairs suite of the firm of Hahn & Lohman, theatrical producers; the kind of office-boy who is addicted to shrill, clear whistling unless very firmly dealt with. No one in the outer office realized how faultless, how rhythmic were the arpeggios and cadences that issued from those expertly puckered lips. There was about his performance an unerring precision. As you listened you felt that his ascent to the inevitable high note was a thing impossible of achievement. Up--up--up he would go, while you held your breath in suspense. And then he took the high note--took it easily, insouciantly--held it, trilled it, tossed it.

"Now, look here," Miss Feldman would snap--Miss Feldman of the outer office typewriter--"look here, you kid. Any more of that bird warbling and you go back to the woods where you belong. This ain't a--a--"

"Aviary," suggested Wallie, almost shyly.

Miss Feldman glared. "How did you know that word?"

"I don't know," helplessly. "But it's the word, isn't it?"

Miss Feldman turned back to her typewriter. "You're too smart for your age, you are."

"I know it," Wallie had agreed, humbly.

There's no telling where or how he learned to play the piano. He probably never did learn. He played it, though, as he whistled--brilliantly. No doubt it was as imitative and as unconscious, too, as his whistling had been. They say he didn't know one note from another, and doesn't to this day.

At twenty, when he should have been in love with at least three girls, he had fixed in his mind an image, a dream. And it bore no resemblance to twenty's accepted dreams. At that time he was living in one room (rear) of a shabby rooming house in Thirty-ninth Street. And this was the dream: By the time he was--well, long before he was thirty--he would have a bachelor apartment with a Jap, Saki. Saki was the perfect servant, noiseless, unobtrusive, expert. He saw little dinners just for four--or, at the most, six. And Saki, white-coated, deft, sliding hot plates when plates should be hot; cold plates when plates should be cold. Then, other evenings, alone, when he wanted to see no one--when, in a silken lounging robe (over faultless dinner clothes, of course, and wearing the kind of collar you see in the back of the magazines) he would say, "That will do, Saki." Then, all evening, he would play softly to himself those little, intimate, wistful Schumann things in the firelight with just one lamp glowing softly--almost sombrely--at the

side of the piano (grand).

His first real meeting with Sid Hahn had had much to do with the fixing of this image. Of course he had seen Hahn hundreds of times in the office and about the theatre. They had spoken, too, many times. Hahn called him vaguely, "Heh, boy!" but he grew to know him later as Wallie. From errand-boy, office-boy, call-boy he had become, by that time, a sort of unofficial assistant stage manager. No one acknowledged that he was invaluable about the place, but he was. When a new play was in rehearsal at the Thalia, Wallie knew more about props, business, cues, lights, and lines than the director himself. For a long time no one but Wallie and the director were aware of this. The director never did admit it. But that Hahn should find it out was inevitable.

He was nineteen or thereabouts when he was sent, one rainy November evening, to deliver a play manuscript to Hahn at his apartment. Wallie might have refused to perform an errand so menial, but his worship of Hahn made him glad of any service, however humble. He buttoned his coat over the manuscript, turned up his collar, and plunged into the cold drizzle of the November evening.

Hahn's apartment--he lived alone--was in the early fifties, off Fifth Avenue. For two days he had been ill with one of the heavy colds to which he was subject. He was unable to leave the house. Hence Wallie's errand.

It was Saki--or Saki's equivalent--who opened the door. A white-coated, soft-stepping Jap, world-old looking like the room glimpsed just beyond. Someone was playing the piano with one finger, horribly.

"You're to give this to Mr. Hahn. He's waiting for it."

"Genelmun come in," said the Jap, softly.

"No, he don't want to see me. Just give it to him, see?"

"Genelmun come in." Evidently orders.

"Oh, all right. But I know he doesn't want--"

Wallie turned down his collar with a quick flip, looked doubtfully at his shoes, and passed through the glowing little foyer into the room beyond. He stood in the doorway. He was scarcely twenty then, but something in him sort of rose, and gathered, and seethed, and swelled, and then hardened. He didn't know it then but it was his great resolve.

Sid Hahn was seated at the piano, a squat, gnomelike little figure, with those big ears, and that plump face, and those soft eyes--the kindest eyes in the world. He did not stop playing as Wallie appeared. He

glanced up at him, ever so briefly, but kindly, too, and went on playing the thing with one short forefinger, excruciatingly. Wallie waited. He had heard somewhere that Hahn would sit at the piano thus, for hours, the tears running down his cheeks because of the beauty of the music he could remember but not reproduce; and partly because of his own inability to reproduce it.

The stubby little forefinger faltered, stopped. He looked up at Wallie.

"God, I wish I could play!"

"Helps a lot."

"You play?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Oh, most anything I've heard once. And some things I kind of make up."

"Compose, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Play one of those."

So Wallie Ascher played one of those. Of course you know "Good Night--Pleasant Dreams." He hadn't named it then. It wasn't even published until almost two years later, but that was what he played for Sid Hahn. Since "After The Ball" no popular song has achieved the success of that one. No doubt it was cheap, and no doubt it was sentimental, but so, too, are "The Suwanee River" and "My Old Kentucky Home," and they'll be singing those when more classical songs have long been forgotten. As Wallie played it his dark, thin face seemed to gleam and glow in the lamplight.

When he had finished Sid Hahn was silent for a moment. Then, "What're you going to do with it?"

"With what?"

"With what you've got. You know."

Wallie knew that he did not mean the song he had just played. "I'm going to--I'm going to do a lot with it."

"Yeh, but how?"

Wallie was looking down at his two lean brown hands on the keys. For a long minute he did not answer. Then: "By thinking about it all the time. And working like hell.... And you've got to be selfish ... You've got to be selfish ..."

As Sid Hahn stared at him, as though hypnotized, the Jap appeared in the doorway. Sid Hahn said, "Stay and have dinner with me," instead of what he had meant to say.

"Oh, I can't! Thanks. I--" He wanted to terribly, but the thought was too much.

"Better."

They had dinner together. Even under the influence of Hahn's encouragement and two glasses of mellow wine whose name he did not know, Wallie did not become fatuous. They talked about music--neither of them knew anything about it, really. Wallie confessed that he used it as an intoxicant and a stimulant.

"That's it!" cried Hahn, excitedly. "If I could play I'd have done more. More."

"Why don't you get one of those piano-players, What-you-call'ems?" Then, immediately, "No, of course not."

"Nah, that doesn't do it," said Hahn, quickly. "That's like adopting a baby when you can't have one of your own. It isn't the same. It isn't the same. It looks like a baby, and acts like a baby, and sounds like a baby--but it isn't yours. It isn't you. That's it! It isn't you!"

"Yeh," agreed Wallie, nodding. So perfectly did they understand each other, this ill-assorted pair.

It was midnight before Wallie left. They had both forgotten about the play manuscript whose delivery had been considered so important. The big room was gracious, quiet, soothing. A fire flickered in the grate. One lamp glowed softly--almost sombrely.

As Wallie rose at last to go he shook himself slightly like one coming out of a trance. He looked slowly about the golden, mellow room. "Gee!"

"Yes, but it isn't worth it," said Hahn, "after you've got it."

"That's what they all say"--grimly--" _after_ they've got it."

The thing that had been born in Sid Hahn's mind thirty years before was now so plainly stamped on this boy's face that Hahn was startled into earnestness. "But I tell you, it's true! It's true!"

"Maybe. Some day, when I'm living in a place like this, I'll let you know if you're right."

In less than a year Wallie Ascher was working with Hahn. No one knew his official title or place. But "Ask Wallie. He'll know," had become a sort of slogan in the office. He did know. At twenty-one his knowledge of the theatre was infallible (this does not include plays unproduced; in this no one is infallible) and his feeling for it amounted to a sixth sense. There was something uncanny about the way he could talk about Lottie, for example, as if he had seen her; or Mrs. Siddons; or Mrs. Fiske when she was Minnie Maddern, the soubrette. It was as though he had the power to cast himself back into the past. No doubt it was that power which gave later to his group of historical plays (written by him between the ages of thirty and thirty-five) their convincingness and authority.

When Wallie was about twenty-three or -four Sid Hahn took him abroad on one of his annual scouting trips. Yearly, in the spring, Hahn swooped down upon London, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, seeking that of the foreign stage which might be translated, fumigated, desiccated, or otherwise rendered suitable for home use. He sent Wallie on to Vienna, alone, on the trail of a musical comedy rumoured to be a second Merry Widow in tunefulness, chic, and charm. Of course it wasn't. Merry Widows rarely repeat. Wallie wired Hahn, as arranged. The telegram is unimportant, perhaps, but characteristic.

MR. SID. HAHN,
Hotel Savoy,
London,
England.

It's a second all right but not a second Merry Widow. Heard of a winner in Budapest. Shall I go. Spent to-day from eleven to five running around the Ringstrasse looking for mythical creature known as the chic Viennese. After careful investigation wish to be quoted as saying the species if any is extinct.

WALLIE.

This, remember, was in the year 1913, B.W. Wallie, obeying instructions, went to Budapest, witnessed the alleged winner, found it as advertised, wired Hahn to that effect, and was joined by that gentleman three days later.

Budapest, at that time, was still Little Paris, only wickeder. A city of magnificent buildings, and unsalted caviar, and beautiful, dangerous women, and frumpy men (civilian) and dashing officers in red pants, and Cigány music, and cafés and paprika and two-horse droshkies. Buda, low

and flat, lay on one side; Pest, high and hilly, perched picturesquely on the other. Between the two rolled the Blue Danube (which is yellow).

It was here that Hahn and Wallie found Mizzi Markis. Mizzi Markis, then a girl of nineteen, was a hod carrier.

Wallie had three days in Budapest before Hahn met him there. As the manager stepped from the train, looking geometrically square in a long ulster that touched his ears and his heels, Wallie met him with a bound.

"Hello, S.H.! Great to see you! Say, listen, I've found something. I've found something big!"

Hahn had never seen the boy so excited. "Oh, shucks! No play's as good as that."

"Play! It isn't a play."

"Why, you young idiot, you said it was good! You said it was darned good! You don't mean to tell me--"

"Oh, that! That's all right. It's good--or will be when you get through with it."

"What you talking about then? Here, let's take one of these things with two horses. Gee, you ought to smoke a fat black seegar and wear a silk hat when you ride in one of these! I feel like a parade." He was like a boy on a holiday, as always when in Europe.

"But let me tell you about this girl, won't you!"

"Oh, it's a girl! What's her name? What's she do?"

"Her name's Mizzi."

"Mizzi what?"

"I don't know. She's a hod carrier. She--"

"That's all right, Wallie. I'm here now. An ice bag on your head and real quiet for two-three days. You'll come round fine."

But Wallie was almost sulking. "Wait till you see her, S.H. She sings."

"Beautiful, is she?"

"No, not particularly. No."

"Wonderful voice, h'm?"

"N-n-no. I wouldn't say it was what you'd call exactly wonderful."

Sid Hahn stood up in the droshky and waved his short arms in windmill circles. "Well, what the devil does she do then, that's so good? Carry bricks!"

"She is good at that. When she balances that pail of mortar on her head and walks off with it, her arms hanging straight at her sides--"

But Sid Hahn's patience was at an end. "You're a humourist, you are. If I didn't know you I'd say you were drunk. I'll bet you are, anyway. You've been eating paprika, raw. You make me sick."

Inelegant, but expressive of his feelings. But Wallie only said, "You wait. You'll see."

Sid Hahn did see. He saw next day. Wallie woke him out of a sound sleep so that he might see. It was ten-thirty A.M. so that his peevishness was unwarranted. They had seen the play the night before and Hahn had decided that, translated and with interpolations (it was a comic opera), it would captivate New York. Then and there he completed the negotiations which Wallie had begun. Hahn was all for taking the first train out, but Wallie was firm. "You've got to see her, I tell you. You've got to see her."

Their hotel faced the Corso. The Corso is a wide promenade that runs along the Buda bank of the Danube. Across the river, on the hill, the royal palace looks down upon the little common people. In that day the monde and the demi-monde of Budapest walked on the Corso between twelve and one. Up and down. Up and down. The women, tall, dark, flashing-eyed, daringly dressed. The men sallow, meagre, and wearing those trousers which, cut very wide and flappy at the ankles, make them the dowdiest men in the world. Hahn's room and Wallie's were on the second floor of the hotel, and at a corner. One set of windows faced the Corso, the river, and Pest on the hill. The other set looked down upon a new building being erected across the way. It was on this building that Mizzi Markis worked as hod carrier.

The war accustomed us to a million women in overalls doing the work of a million men. We saw them ploughing, juggling steel bars, making shells, running engines, stoking furnaces, handling freight. But to these two American men, at that time, the thing at which these labouring women were employed was dreadful and incredible.

Said Wallie "By the time we've dressed, and had breakfast, and walked a little and everything, it'll be almost noon. And noon's the time. After they've eaten their lunch. But I want you to see her before."

By now his earnestness had impressed Hahn who still feigned an indifference he did not feel. It was about 11:30 when Wallie propelled him by the arm to the unfinished building across the way. And there he met Mizzi.

They were just completing the foundation. The place was a busy hive. Back and forth with pails. Back and forth with loads of bricks.

"What's the matter with the men?" was Hahn's first question.

Wallie explained. "They do the dainty work. They put one brick on top of the other, with a dab of mortar between. But none of the back-breaking stuff for them. The women do that."

And it was so. They were down in the pits mixing the mortar, were the women. They were carrying great pails of it. They were hauling bricks up one ladder and down. They wore short, full skirts with a musical-comedy-chorus effect. Some of them looked seventy and some seventeen. It was fearful work for a woman. A keen wind was blowing across the river. Their hands were purple.

"Pick Mizzi," said Wallie. "If you can pick her I'll know I'm right. But I know it, anyway."

Five minutes passed. The two men stood silent. "The one with the walk and the face," said Hahn, then. Which wasn't very bright of him, because they all walked and they all had faces. "Going up the pit-ladder now. With the pail on her head." Wallie gave a little laugh of triumph. But then, Hahn wouldn't have been Hahn had he not been able to pick a personality when he saw it.

Years afterward the reviewers always talked of Mizzi's walk. They called it her superb carriage. They didn't know that you have to walk very straight, on the balls of your feet, with your hips firm, your stomach held in flat, your shoulders back, your chest out, your chin out and a little down, if you are going to be at all successful in balancing a pail of mortar on your head. After a while that walk becomes a habit.

"Watch her with that pail," said Wallie.

Mizzi filled the pail almost to the top with the heavy white mixture. She filled it quickly, expertly. The pail, filled, weighed between seventeen and twenty kilos. One kilo is equal to about two and one fifth pounds. The girl threw down her scoop, stooped, grasped the pail by its two handles, and with one superb, unbroken motion raised the pail high in her two strong arms and placed it on her head. Then she breathed deeply, once, set her whole figure, turned stiffly, and was off with it. Sid Hahn took on a long breath as though he himself had just accomplished the gymnastic feat.

"Well, so far it's pretty good. But I don't know that the American stage is clamouring for any hod carriers and mortar mixers, exactly."

A whistle blew. Twelve o'clock. Bricks, mortar, scoops, shovels were abandoned. The women, in their great clod-hopping shoes, flew chattering to the tiny hut where their lunch boxes were stored. The men followed more slowly, a mere handful of them. Not one of them wore overalls or apron. Out again with their bundles and boxes of food--very small bundles. Very tiny boxes. They ate ravenously the bread and sausage and drank their beer in great gulps. Fifteen minutes after the whistle had blown the last crumb had vanished.

"Now, then," said Wallie, and guided Hahn nearer. He looked toward Mizzi. Everyone looked toward her. Mizzi stood up, brushing crumbs from her lap. She had a little four-cornered black shawl, folded cross-wise, over her head and tied under her chin. Her face was round and her cheeks red. The shawl, framing this, made her look very young and cherubic.

She did not put her hands on her hips, or do any of those story-book things. She grinned, broadly, showing strong white teeth made strong and white through much munching of coarse black bread; not yet showing the neglect common to her class. She asked a question in a loud, clear voice.

"What's that?" asked Hahn.

"She's talking a kind of hunky Hungarian, I guess. The people here won't speak German, did you know that? They hate it."

The crowd shouted back with one voice. They settled themselves comfortably, sitting or standing. Their faces held the broad smile of anticipation.

"She asked them what they want her to sing. They told her. It's the same every day."

Mizzi Markis stood there before them in the mud, and clay, and straw of the building débris. And she sang for them a Hungarian popular song of the day which, translated, sounds idiotic and which runs something like this:

A hundred geese in a row
Going into the coop.
At the head of the procession
A stick over his shoulder--

No, you can't do it. It means less than nothing that way, and certainly would not warrant the shrieks of mirth that came from the audience

gathered round the girl. Still, when you recall the words of "A Hot Time":

When you hear dem bells go ding-ling-ling,
All join round and sweetly you must sing
And when the words am through in the chorus all join in
There'll be a _hot time_
In the _old town_
To-night.
My
Ba-
By.

And yet it swept this continent, and Europe, and in Japan they still think it's our national anthem.

When she had finished, the crowd gave a roar of delight, and clapped their hands, and stamped their feet, and shouted. She had no unusual beauty. Her voice was untrained though possessed of strength and flexibility. It wasn't what she had sung, surely. You heard the song in a hundred cafés. Every street boy whistled it. It wasn't that expressive pair of shoulders, exactly. It wasn't a certain soothing tonal quality that made you forget all the things you'd been trying not to remember.

There is something so futile and unconvincing about an attempted description of an intangible thing. Some call it personality; some call it magnetism; some a rhythm sense; and some, genius. It's all these things, and none of them. Whatever it is, she had it. And whatever it is, Sid Hahn has never failed to recognize it.

So now he said, quietly, "She's got it."

"You bet she's got it!" from Wallie. "She's got more than Renée Paterné ever had. A year of training and some clothes--"

"You don't need to tell me. I'm in the theatrical business, myself."

"I'm sorry," stiffly.

But Hahn, too, was sorry immediately. "You know how I am, Wallie. I like to run a thing off by myself. What do you know about her? Find out anything?"

"Well, a little. She doesn't seem to have any people. And she's decent. Kind of a fierce kid, I guess, and fights when offended. They say she's Polish, not Hungarian. Her mother was a peasant. Her father--nobody knows. I had a dickens of a time finding out anything. The most terrible language in the world--Hungarian. They'll stick a _b_ next to a _k_ and

follow it up with a _z_ and put an accent mark over the whole business and call it a word. Last night I followed her home. And guess what!"

"What?" said Hahn, obligingly.

"On her way she had to cross the big square--the one they call Gisela Tér, with all the shops around it. Well, when she came to Gerbeaud's--"

"What's Gerbeaud's?"

"That's the famous tea room and pastry shop where all the swells go and guzzle tea with rum in it and eat cakes--and say! It isn't like our pastry that tastes like sawdust covered with shaving soap. Marvellous stuff, this is!"

After all, he was barely twenty-four. So Hahn said, good-naturedly, "All right, all right. We'll go there this afternoon and eat an acre of it. Go on. When she came to Gerbeaud's...?"

"Well, when she came to Gerbeaud's she stopped and stood there, outside. There was a strip of red carpet from the door to the street. You know--the kind they have at home when there's a wedding on Fifth Avenue. There she stood at the edge of the carpet, waiting, her face, framed in that funny little black shawl, turned toward the window, and the tail of the little shawl kind of wagging in the wind. It was cold and nippy. I waited, too. Finally I sort of strolled over to her--I knew she couldn't any more than knock me down--and said, kind of casual, 'What's doing?' She looked up at me, like a kid, in that funny shawl. She knew I was an Englees, right away. I guess I must have a fine, open countenance. And I had motioned toward the red carpet, and the crowded windows. Anyway, she opens up with a regular burst of fireworks Hungarian, in that deep voice of hers. Not only that, she acted it out. In two seconds she had on an imaginary coronet and a court train. And haughty! Gosh! I was sort of stumped, but I said, 'You don't say!' and waited some more. And then they flung open the door of the tea shop thing. At the same moment up dashed an equipage--you couldn't possibly call it anything less--with flunkeys all over the outside, like trained monkeys. The people inside the shop stood up, with their mouths full of cake, and out came an old frump with a terrible hat and a fringe. And it was the Archduchess, and her name is Josefa."

"Your story interests me strangely, boy," Hahn said, grinning, "but I don't quite make you. Do archduchesses go to tea rooms for tea? And what's that got to do with our gifted little hod carrier?"

"This duchess does. Believe me, those tarts are good enough for the Queen of Hearts, let alone a duchess, no matter how arch. But the plot of the piece is this. The duchess person goes to Gerbeaud's about twice a week. And they always spread a red carpet for her. And Mizzi always

manages to cut away in time to stand there in front of Gerbeaud's and see her come out. She's a gorgeous mimic, that little kid. And though I couldn't understand a word she said I managed to get out of it just this: That some day they're going to spread a red carpet for Mizzi and she's going to walk down it in glory. If you'd seen her face when she said it, S.H., you wouldn't laugh."

"I wouldn't laugh anyway," said Hahn, seriously.

And that's the true story of Mizzi Markis's beginning. Few people know it.

* * * * *

There they were, the three of them. And of the three, Mizzi's ambition seemed to be the fiercest, the most implacable. She worked like a horse, cramming English, French, singing. In some things she was like a woman of thirty; in others a child of ten. Her gratitude to Hahn was pathetic. No one ever doubted that he was in love with her almost from the first--he who had resisted the professional beauties of three decades.

You know she wasn't--and isn't--a beauty, even in that portrait of her by Sargent, with her two black-haired, stunning-looking boys, one on either side. But she was one of those gorgeously healthy women whose very presence energizes those with whom she comes in contact. And then there was about her a certain bounteousness. There's no other word for it, really. She reminded you of those gracious figures you see posed for pictures entitled "Autumn Harvest."

While she was studying she had a little apartment with a middle-aged woman to look after her, and she must have been a handful. A born cook, she was, and Hahn and Wallie used to go there to dinner whenever she would let them. She cooked it herself. Hahn would give up any engagement for a dinner at Mizzi's. When he entered her little sitting room his cares seemed to drop from him. She never got over cutting bread as the peasant women do it--the loaf held firmly against her breast, the knife cutting toward her. Hahn used to watch her and laugh. Sometimes she would put on the little black head-shawl of her Budapest days and sing the street-song about the hundred geese in a row. A delightful, impudent figure.

With the very first English she learned she told Hahn and Wallie that some day they were going to spread a fine red carpet for her to tread upon and that all the world would gaze on her with envy. It was in her mind a symbol typifying all that there was of earthly glory.

"It'll be a long time before they do any red carpeting for you, my girl," Sid Hahn had said.

She turned on him fiercely. "I will not rest--I will not eat--I will not sleep--I will not love--until I have it."

Which was, of course, an exaggerated absurdity.

"Oh, what rot!" Wallie Ascher had said, angrily, and then he had thought of his own symbol of success, and his own resolve. And his face had hardened. Sid Hahn looked at the two of them; very young, both of them, very gifted, very electric. Very much in love with each other, though neither would admit it even in their own minds. Both their stern young faces set toward the goal which they thought meant happiness.

Now, Sid Hahn had never dabbled in this new stuff--you know--complexes and fixed ideas and images. But he was a very wise man, and he did know to what an extent these two were possessed by ambition for that which they considered desirable.

He must have thought it over for weeks. He was in love with Mizzi, remember. And his fondness for Wallie was a thing almost paternal. He watched these two for a long, long time, a queer, grim little smile on his gargoyle face. And then his mind was made up. He had always had his own way. He must have had a certain terrible enjoyment in depriving himself of the one thing he wanted most in the world--the one thing he wanted more than he had ever wanted anything.

He decided that Destiny--a ponderous, slow-moving creature at best--needed a little prodding from him. His plans were simple, as all effective plans are.

Mizzi had been in America just a year and a half. Her development was amazing, but she was far from being the finished product that she became in later years. Hahn decided to chance it. Mizzi had no fear of audiences. He had tried her out on that. An audience stimulated her. She took it to her breast. She romped with it.

He found a play at last. A comedy, with music. It was frankly built for Mizzi. He called Wallie Ascher into his office.

"I wouldn't try her out here for a million. New York's too fly. Some little thing might be wrong--you know how they are. And all the rest would go for nothing. The kindest audience in the world--when they like you. And the cruelest when they don't. We'll go on the road for two weeks. Then we'll open at the Blackstone in Chicago. I think this girl has got more real genius than any woman since--since Bernhardt in her prime. Five years from now she won't be singing. She'll be acting. And it'll _be_ acting."

"Aren't you forcing things just a little?" asked Wallie, coolly.

"Oh, no. No. Anyway, it's just a try-out. By the way, Wallie, I'll probably be gone almost a month. If things go pretty well in Chicago I'll run over to French Lick for eight or ten days and see if I can't get a little of this stiffness out of my old bones. Will you do something for me?"

"Sure."

"Pack a few clothes and go up to my place and live there, will you? The Jap stays on, anyway. The last time I left it alone things went wrong. You'll be doing me a favour. Take it and play the piano, and have your friends in, and boss the Jap around. He's stuck on you, anyway. Says he likes to hear you play."

He stayed away six weeks. And any one who knows him knows what hardship that was. He loved New York, and his own place, and his comfort, and his books; and hotel food gave him hideous indigestion.

Mizzi's first appearance was a moderate success. It was nothing like the sensation of her later efforts. She wasn't ready, and Hahn knew it. Mizzi and her middle-aged woman companion were installed at the Blackstone Hotel, which is just next door to the Blackstone Theatre, as any one is aware who knows Chicago. She was advertised as the Polish comedienne, Mizzi Markis, and the announcements hinted at her royal though remote ancestry. And on the night the play opened, as Mizzi stepped from the entrance of her hotel on her way to the stage door, just forty or fifty feet away, there she saw stretched on the pavement a scarlet path of soft-grained carpet for her feet to tread. From the steps of the hotel to the stage door of the theatre, there it lay, a rosy line of splendour.

The newspapers played it up as a publicity stunt. Every night, while the play lasted, the carpet was there. It was rolled up when the stage door closed upon her. It was unrolled and spread again when she came out after the performance. Hahn never forgot her face when she first saw it, and realized its significance. The look was there on the second night, and on the third, but after that it faded, vanished, and never came again. Mizzi had tasted of the golden fruit and found it dry and profitless, without nourishment or sweetness.

The show closed in the midst of a fairly good run. It closed abruptly, without warning. Together they came back to New York. Just outside New York Hahn knocked at the door of Mizzi's drawing room and stuck his round, ugly face in at the opening.

"Let's surprise Wallie," he said.

"Yes," said Mizzi, listlessly.

"He doesn't know the show's closed. We'll take a chance on his being home for dinner. Unless you're too tired."

"I'm not tired."

The Jap admitted them, and Hahn cut off his staccato exclamations with a quick and smothering hand. They tiptoed into the big, gracious, lamp-lighted room.

Wallie was seated at the piano. He had on a silk dressing gown with a purple cord. One of those dressing gowns you see in the haberdashers' windows, and wonder who buys them. He looked very tall in it, and rather distinguished, but not quite happy. He was playing as they came in. They said, "Boo!" or something idiotic like that. He stood up. And his face!

"Why, hello!" he said, and came forward, swiftly. "Hello! Hello!"

"Hello!" Hahn answered; "Not to say hello-hello."

Wallie looked at the girl. "Hello, Mizzi."

"Hello," said Mizzi.

"For God's sake stop saying 'hello!'" roared Hahn.

They both looked at him absently, and then at each other again.

Hahn flung his coat and hat at the Jap and rubbed his palms briskly together. "Well, how did you like it?" he said, and slapped Wallie on the back. "How'd you like it--the place I mean, and the Jap boy and all? H'm?"

"Very much," Wallie answered, formally. "Very nice."

"You'll be having one of your own some day, soon. That's sure."

"I suppose so," said Wallie, indifferently.

"I would like to go home," said Mizzi, suddenly, in her precise English.

At that Wallie leaped out of his lounging coat. "I'll take you! I'll--I'll be glad to take you."

Hahn smiled a little, ruefully. "We were going to have dinner here, the three of us. But if you're tired, Mizzi. I'm not so chipper myself when it comes to that." He looked about the room, gratefully. "It's good to be home."

Wallie, hat in hand, was waiting in the doorway, Mizzi, turning to go,

suddenly felt two hands on her shoulders. She was whirled around. Hahn--he had to stand on tiptoe to do it--kissed her once on the mouth, hard. Then he gave her a little shove toward the door. "Tell Wallie about the red carpet," he said.

"I will not," Mizzi replied, very distinctly. "I hate red carpets."

Then they were gone. Hahn hardly seemed to notice that they had left. There were, I suppose, the proper number of Good-byes, and See-you-to-morrows, and Thank yous.

Sid Hahn stood there a moment in the middle of the room, very small, very squat, rather gnomelike, but not at all funny. He went over to the piano and seated himself, his shoulders hunched, his short legs clearing the floor. With the forefinger of his right hand he began to pick out a little tune. Not a sad little tune. A Hungarian street song. He did it atrociously. The stubby forefinger came down painstakingly on the white keys. Suddenly the little Jap servant stood in the doorway. Hahn looked up. His cheeks were wet with tears.

"God! I wish I could play!" he said.

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